UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

A Site of Meaning: "Black Gospel" in a Multicultural Church

by

Angela Marie Taranger ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of Music

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A Site of Meaning: 'Black Gospel' in a Multicultural Church," in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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The musicians at ECWH have made my "field study" pure joy. I would particularly like to acknowledge the remarkable musical talents of instrumentalists Quenten Brown, Brent Dunbar, and Johnny Collins, Jr. The choirs, "Voices of Joy" and "Little Saints," lift the soul; thank-you to leaders Renée Collins and Quenten Brown, Leah Carter Pessoa and Genetta Carter Jamerson.

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To the people of ECWH: this paper is dedicated to you.

Abstract

A Site of Meaning: "Black Gospel" in a Multicultural Church

This paper examines the manner by which "black gospel" music (performed according to aesthetic standards determined by African Americans) becomes a site of meaning for both black and white congregants at Edmonton Community Worship Hour, a church with an interracial and multi-ethnic ministry.

Certain "transformations" (or "inversions") are at play in the conceptual systems of those people who attend; each congregant has varying and fluid sets of understandings which become operational in a cross-cultural setting, relating to: the aesthetics of performance, the "language" of religious practice, and the conventions of interpersonal relations.

The people at ECWH, although they do not share a common cultural history, can relate individually to black gospel: because it represents complementary (although diverse) meanings to each one, its performance provides a "liminal space" within which "difference" can be confronted and community can be fashioned.

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My deepest appreciation to Dr. Regula Qureshi, whose scholarship has been an inspiration, and whose insistence on academic honesty and rigor has heightened my own awareness of what constitutes excellence.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION: "BLACK GOSPEL" IN A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH

1.1 Describing Difference

In my study involving the people of Edmonton Community Worship Hour (or ECWH, as the church is more commonly known), I have wrestled with the language of description. Terms used to describe cultural distinctions are often awkward and unsatisfactory. However, in order to bring some degree of clarification to a discussion in which the "perception of difference" is an issue, I have standardized the following terms to mean particular concepts within the context of this study:

black -- a conceptual, rather than descriptive, term referring to those who would identify themselves as part of the African diaspora.

white -- a conceptual, rather than descriptive, term referring to those who would identify themselves as part of a Euro-Canadian or Euro-American majority.

African American (noun) or *African-American* or *Afro-American* (adjectives) -- members of the African diaspora who were born in the United States and who would identify themselves as being African American. Of the people who attend ECWH, a number are, as yet, American citizens, although they have lived in Canada for several years.

African Canadian (noun) or *African-Canadian* (adjective) -- members of the African diaspora who are Canadian, either by birth or because they have immigrated and lived some time in this country. (At ECWH, many of the latter are from the Caribbean.) This is an inclusive term: I use it primarily to indicate a distinction from African-Americans; that I have not intended to imply a homogeneous African-Canadian "experience" will, I hope, become clear throughout the course of the paper.

European American (noun) or *European-American* or *Euro-American* (adjectives) -- white Americans who were born in Europe or who are of European origin.

European Canadian (noun) or *European-Canadian* or *Euro-Canadian* (adjectives) -- white Canadians who were born in Europe or who are of European origin.

1.2 Positing the Question

This is a paper about the genre of music known as "black gospel." However, it is not an analysis of characteristics and structure: rather, I have chosen to explore the function of this music as an expression of worship, within the context of a church. The church is Edmonton Community Worship Hour, and its congregation lives throughout the city of Edmonton (an urban community of well over 600,000 people), some actually commuting from smaller communities outside of the city limits. The majority of these people are black (for the most part, African-Canadian), but a significant proportion of them are white Canadians. They unite in a practice of worship which reflects strongly the music and speech idioms of the American black church--understandably so, since the church's minister is African-American. Therefore, the presentation of religious concepts is in "language," both musical and rhetorical, which must have been at first unfamiliar, not only to white congregants, but also to African Canadians raised in other traditions. However, people continue to come in ever-increasing numbers, engaging in the creation of a religious community which is obliged to, in some sense, represent all of them.

I am therefore concerned with the process by which "black gospel," and the message it embodies, has become meaningful to these people, who reflect an astonishing diversity of experience. What enables it to minister across traditional racial, cultural, and denominational boundaries and how has it become a "site of meaning" for each of these people?

1.3 Situating the Church, the Music, and the Study

Edmonton Community Worship Hour is a church distinguished from most of its neighbours by its mandate; it is committed to a ministry which embraces an interracial, multicultural constituency. This cross-cultural emphasis is intentional, having been integral to the character of the church since its inception. Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr. is an African-American minister who came from Reno, Nevada, ten years ago to serve in Edmonton as the minister of Shiloh Baptist Church, "the first black church in Edmonton, the province of Alberta, and western Canada."[1] (Shiloh had been organized in 1910 as a congregation of The Baptist Union of Western Canada, and is still active.) Reverend Collins subsequently resigned as minister of Shiloh and, seven years ago, he (along with about twenty other people) founded Edmonton Community Worship Hour, or ECWH, as it is more commonly called. This church now draws a weekly congregation of about 150 people, and has an increasingly visible profile in the greater Edmonton community, not only because of the heterogeneity of its people, but also because of the distinctiveness of its music, identified by church and the larger community alike as "black gospel."[2] Black gospel is a genre of music most often to be heard in American churches characterized by a *de facto* segregation, but at ECWH it has become part of the pattern of worship practised by a cosmopolitan congregation.

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[1] From a paper written by Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr., as part of the requirements of the Doctor of Ministry Program, St. Stephen's College, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, September, 1988.

[2] The importance of black gospel to the identity of ECWH is illustrated by the weekly two-hour program featuring this genre on a local radio station, prepared and presented by members of the church and including not only music, but also Bible passages and inspirational talks.

The people at the church are visually diverse, black congregants outnumbering white at a ration of about three to one. However, these obvious differences may overshadow others, just as significant, which are revealed in the variety of speech patterns to be heard from the pulpit, in the foyer, or during pre- and post-worship visiting in the pews. These reflect places of origin in Africa, Europe, and the Americas.[3]

My initial experience with ECWH took place in the fall of 1994 as part of a field-work study. At that time, I was present in the Sunday morning services anonymously, one of many visitors who are drawn each week to experience a distinctive form of worship practice. This initial period of observation involved attendance at several Sunday morning worship services over the course of a month, during which I became aware that a significant number of the visitors to ECWH were there because they had either heard, or heard *about*, the music. This was, of course, my own motivation--I was intrigued by the prospect of hearing black gospel performed "live"--of *experiencing* it within the context of a Sunday morning service, as a form of religious worship.

Music greeted me when I entered the door of the church shortly before 11:00 a.m. The organist was providing a palette of sound--a non-intrusive background for the finding of seats and the quiet murmur of voices as people greeted one another. After the "call to worship" by a member of the pastoral team, a "praise team" moved to the space just below the platform to lead the congregation in a time of "celebration" through singing. As they announced the name of the first song, the organ and drums introduced it musically. Congregants rose to their feet, moving and clapping in time to the music, and singing the song repeatedly, carrying the performance of one verse through a development which lasted as long as was necessary for a sense of completion (one member of the praise team indicating closure by a hand signal). Another chorus of praise followed, this one gentler. Voices quietened, almost "moaning" an expression of adoration, and bodies swayed in slow accompaniment. At the close of this song, various "lay" members extended a welcome to first-time visitors, led in the reading of Scripture and prayer, and announced upcoming events.

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[3] Places of origin represented by congregants, either now or at some time in the past, include: Jamaica, Haiti, Barbados, Trinidad/Tobago, Dominica, St. Vincent, St. Kitts/Nevis, Guyana, Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Poland, The Netherlands, Scotland, England, Ireland, as well as the United States and Canada. This information is revealed by flags displayed on one of the walls of the sanctuary.

Musical "selections" were presented by a choir, a musical ensemble, or a soloist, accompanied by the organist and percussionist (often joined by a pianist, and occasionally a guitarist and a conga drummer). The offertory also featured music, the entire congregation moving in an orderly fashion out of the pews and circling past the offertory baskets, walking in time to songs played by the instrumentalists, and singing quietly as they went. Following this, children gathered in the front of the sanctuary for a short "lesson," after which they were dismissed downstairs for "junior church." Another extended period of congregational singing, described as the "big choir," prepared the congregation for the sermon, most often preached by the senior pastor, Reverend Collins, but at other times featuring "ministers in training," Andrew Bennett, Seeon Smith, or Craig Hendrickson, or the administrative secretary (and women's counsellor), Marlene Brown.

It was obvious that music played a far more significant part in the structure of ECWH's worship service than in any other of which I had previously been a part; it was present, in one form or another, during more than half of the two-hour program. The singing of each song, whether by one of the choirs or by the congregation, might become prolonged through repetition and innovation for as long as fifteen minutes before concluding. As well, the boundary between song and speech appeared indistinct to me--songs were embellished by spoken responses, while prayer and sermon were often characterized by a chanting, semi-musical style. The members of the congregation acted as participants in the dynamic creation of the "worship space," seeming sometimes to "take ownership" of the process of praise--particularly in songs, but also, to some extent, in prayers and sermons--a phenomenon condoned (even encouraged) by the leaders.

Gradually, my perceptions of what I was observing began to be affected by the process itself. I became aware that gospel music is most appropriately studied within the context of worship, as the religious expression of a body of believers. This is because the texts, with their explicitly Christian message, have meaning primarily to people who share the language--who recognize biblical allusions and who have an understanding of the theology that is implicit in the words. Secondly, the "black gospel" music that I heard at ECWH was stubbornly resistant to my efforts to study it as an embodiment of a monolithic musical genre. Certainly, all of the music performed there was characterized by a "sound" I identified as "black," and it was set to texts expressing religious concepts--but these might be sung by a choir, a soloist, a vocal ensemble, or the congregation; they might feature unison singing (children's choir), three-part harmony (adults' choir), or four-part harmony (a male quartet which performed on one of my early visits). Voices usually demonstrated a "grainy" quality, but occasionally one might produce a smoother "soul" sound; and while the keyboard player provided scale-based jazz-like accompaniments on the

Hammond organ, on the piano his improvisations were constituted of chords and arpeggios. Often the song-leaders (the group of three or four people called a "praise team") who led the congregation in singing, would create an antiphonal sound structure, voices slipping in and out of the song and layering melismatic improvisations upon the basic melody line carried by the congregation, the whole forming a polyphony. People at the church would identify all of these song performances as "black gospel" music, but when, during my later conversations with them, I asked them to define what they meant by this designation, they would most often discuss the music in terms of its spiritual impact--the ability it had to "speak" to them. This led me, very gradually, to realize that the music at the church, while multi-faceted, is but one expression of a more comprehensive "language of ritual" (expressed by sound and speech and distinguished by its demonstrative and participatory character) which pervades the services and is meaningful to the participants.

Thus, my initial desire to "capture the essence" of a cultural artifact--"the music"--was displaced by a fascination with the process by which it (and the entire ritual of worship of which it is a manifestation) has become personal to individuals representing unusually diverse experiences. I moved away from a preoccupation with musical analysis to a concern with issues of meaning and representation. In other words, I began to ask, "How does the music at ECWH communicate to the people who listen, and what does it represent to those who have chosen to worship together?"

My study is concerned with the manner whereby this "language of ritual" becomes the worship form of choice, not exclusively for African Americans, but for a congregation reflecting widely-disparate cultures and places of origin. What is the process by which black gospel, performed according to aesthetic standards determined by African Americans, has become a site of meaning for each of the congregational members at ECWH--both black and white?

1.4 Developing a Method of Study

Much of the information used in this project was acquired through participant observation while attending church functions at ECWH (in particular, the Sunday morning worship service) during February, March, and April, 1995, and from September of 1995 to May of 1996. Since membership in the church is a prerequisite for singing in the choir or playing musical instruments, and this in turn involves attendance at New Members' classes for up to a year, I have not engaged as an "insider" in the production of music. However, although I began as an outside observer--an academic voyeur--I was drawn into the practice of worship. I began to participate as a congregant, adding to my own impressions the insights of other members of the congregation. Interviews with individuals (beginning with Reverend Collins) proved to be invaluable, challenging my preconceptions and steering the project in directions I could not have anticipated. As I began to speak to people about their experiences, I became less a stranger and more a participant in the church community; my own experiences of "sameness" and "difference" thus became meaningful to the study, reflecting yet another struggle with accommodation.

The voices of many people are integrated into this paper. At times I have acknowledged this, when the quotation was taken directly from an interview transcript. The people who speak are, for the most part, identified by name. Occasionally, however, they (and I) have felt that their personal identity was either irrelevant to the discussion or, conversely, that the material was particularly sensitive and best dealt with anonymously. At other times, their voices are inseparable from my own--because I can no longer always distinguish between "my" and "their" perceptions. The "speakers" in this paper embody the roles of leadership and laity, church member and seeker, male and female; each of them has contributed observations and discernments that I could have gained no other way. Audiotapes of worship services (available through the sound technician at the church), along with a videotape I was able to make of one of the services, provided visual and audio corroboration of (and correction to) my impressions.

1.5 Setting Parameters

In order to determine how black gospel functions in a meaningful way to the people who attend ECWH, I have approached it within the following framework.

In Chapter Two the music of both performance and participation is examined to provide some insight into the aesthetic standards that permeate the performance of music at ECWH. These standards reflect the preferences of those who have input into choices (whether they be the performers themselves, the leaders, or members of the congregation at large); they also inform the way in which each listener relates to songs. The music is a multifaceted expression of stylistic elements of vocalization and instrumentation, providing the vehicle for the expression of texts designed to reflect and encourage spiritual experience.

Chapter Three looks at these "texts" in more detail. It includes an analysis of the message of praise and "celebration" and its expression in both oratory and worship style. The "message" not only expresses theological tenets but also governs the practices of preaching and music-making at ECWH. The church reflects a Christian orthodoxy, familiar to people who have experience in virtually any Canadian Protestant tradition. The style of expression is, however, most directly attributable to the American black church (through Reverend Collins) and will therefore, of course, have relevance in differing ways to the people who attend the church, and whose prior experiences of worship have encompassed other traditions.

Chapter Four explores some of the implications of a ministry which addresses interpersonal relations in an interracial, multicultural context. ECWH has attracted congregants, both black and white, who are prepared to redefine traditional roles. The boundaries protecting longstanding hegemonic domains are being re-examined and renegotiated. It is an exciting project, one which has involved Reverend Collins and the church he has founded in "a form of personal and collective self-fashioning."[4] Each person who becomes a member is indicating, in effect, a desire to become part of an experience in plurality; and they choose to share in a worship and musical style which may represent a variety of things to them, depending upon their previous experience. To each of them, it "speaks" in a special way, one which becomes internalized and truly their own.

It is obvious that, in studying and participating, I have also become involved in this process of "making meaning." And it is through my own and other people's articulations of these meanings that we may glimpse how they translate into a shared communication which demands a relinquishing of previously-exclusive domains and an abandoning of potentially-divisive stereotypes.

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[4] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988), 9.

Chapter Two

SHIFTING MUSICAL AESTHETICS

2.1 The Process of Inversion

> *I would say a good thirty-three per cent ... of the people that have come to our church [have] actually said that they first came because they heard about the music.* (A comment by a member of the congregation.)

People who attend Edmonton Community Worship Hour are asked, on their first visit, to indicate how they heard about the church or, alternatively, what first brought them there; often, they respond that they have "heard about the music." It is somewhat unclear if they are referring to the choirs, whether adults' ("Voices of Joy") or children's ("Little Saints"), to other music performed by soloists or ensembles, or to the congregational singing. Perhaps they are uncertain themselves until they have come, listened and participated. Regardless of the vehicle of performance, however, all of these different expressions of the music of the church embody stylistic features commonly found in black gospel and, by extension, in African-American-influenced contemporary music generally.

> Afro-Americans repeatedly point to a resonance between Black sacred and secular musical performances, which have in common certain components: dance, vocal and instrumental technique, style of delivery, manipulation of text, timbre, rhythm, visual image (e.g. dress), and audience feedback. For each type of music, *the principles underlying the performance remain the same*; only the outward manifestations of the components differ, and frequently these differences are negligible.[5] (Italics mine.)

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[5] Mellonee V. Burnim & Portia K. Maultsby, "From Backwoods to City Streets: The Afro-American Musical Journey," in *Expressively Black: The Cultural Basis of Ethnic Identity*, ed. Geneva Gay & Willie Baber (New York: Praeger, 1987), 132-3.

The familiarity of such features to the people who enter the doors of ECWH can be assumed, in that much of the contemporary secular music with which they are familiar has been produced in accordance with aesthetic standards informed, defined and performed in significant measure by musicians and scholars of the African diaspora.

> *There's a lot of joy in it, y'know ... and it's cool! --It helps me to realize in a way that God is not just ... up there--He's cool! He's mighty! He's the inventor of music, and He has fun with it.* (April Dunbar, choir member.)

Certain qualities of style and content found in blues, rhythm and blues, jazz, "soul" and, of course, gospel, are perceived as "cool" by consumers of today's popular culture, which include those people attracted to ECWH precisely because its music demonstrates aesthetic characteristics common to all of these genres.

A complex interplay of factors, operating within the context of intercultural diffusion and borrowing, has resulted in this perception. The process by which it has happened can be addressed by reference to a "cultural framework" articulated in a general way by Mark Slobin in a wide-ranging exploration of the relations governing musical communities.[6] He distinguishes between musical subcultures and supercultures (1992, 2), suggesting that the difference between the two can be understood in terms of their relationship to the institutions of hegemony (1992, 13). A musical superculture, he says, asserts control through three agencies: an *industry* which, through advertising, "justif[ies] the ways of the superculture to man, woman, and child"; the *state* and its attendant "rules and venues"; and the large body of "*shared assumptions* about every aspect of music-making," perpetuated by stereotypes and standardized performance practices (1992, 17-18). It logically follows that a subculture (or "micromusic" [1992, 1]) must therefore be a less powerful cultural grouping with reduced access to these hegemonic resources. However, its precise nature is one which Slobin has difficulty in defining, and he admits to a deliberate "subsum[ing][in his own study] of material relating to the music of African-Americans" because there is some question as to "whether African-American music should be treated like any other micromusic" (1992, 81).

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[6] Mark Slobin, "Micromusics of the West: A Comparative Approach," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 36, no. 1 (Winter, 1992): 1-87.

Ingrid Monson, in her 1994 article in *Critical Inquiry*, directly confronts this issue of categorization:

> ... The notion of subculture as applied to African-American music has a problematic aspect because the predominant direction of influence in American popular music in the twentieth century has been from African-American to European-American. In the musical sphere, African-Americans *invert the expected relationship between hegemonic superculture and subculture* (without, however, changing these relationships in the economic sphere), something which is of extreme symbolic importance to African-American communities.[7] (Italics mine.)

Monson's assessment of inter-cultural interconnectedness is situated within her ethnographic fieldwork among jazz musicians; however, its appositeness to any study of contemporary musical genres is obvious. Gospel, blues, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, soul, and rap all have their roots in the historical experience of African-Americans and are vulnerable to the appellation of "subculture": "the expressive forms and rituals of those subordinate groups who are alternately dismissed, denounced and canonized."[8] As both Hebdige and Monson are careful to point out, the identification of any ostensibly discrete group as a "subculture" carries with it certain dangers: the tendency for media controlled by the dominant culture to either reduce such Otherness to sameness or, alternatively, to portray them as "exotica" (Hebdige 1979, 97). It is the latter which Monson addresses: "The tendency of non-African-Americans to make ... the idea of an exoticized subculture stand for the jazz community is deeply resented by most [jazz musicians and audience members]" (1994, 287).

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[7] Ingrid T. Monson, "Doubleness and Jazz Improvisation: Irony, Parody, and Ethnomusicology," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Winter, 1994): 286.

[8] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1979), 2.

In opposition to the stereotype of the jazz musician as a "primitive" who "maintains a pure, emotional, and unmediated relationship to his art" (1994, 286), Monson juxtaposes her study of musicians who recognize, appropriate and comment upon other musics. She illustrates her argument by examples which reveal these musicians inverting customary hegemonic musical standards through their improvisations upon European-American art music and popular music forms, in ways which "assert the power of the African-American musical aesthetic to 'improve' the music of European-Americans" (1994, 293). In the process, they use elements of harmonic and rhythmic complexity, as well as improvisational intricacy--qualities also valued by the classical Western aesthetic--with skill and sophistication. They thus satisfy the criteria of both European- and African-American musics. In ways such as these, from their position as heirs to what has been variously described as a "two-toned heritage"[9] or a "collage"[10] identity, African-American musicians have been major voices in the articulation of a musical aesthetic which allows for the mastery, the transformation and, frequently, the inversion of "mainstream ... conventions" (Monson 1994, 290). Of course, It should not have been necessary for musicians of an "other" aesthetic system to prove their legitimacy by "playing the game" according to Western standards. However, by so doing, they have provided a bridge of understanding by which people of both cultures could (to some extent) enter into, and appreciate, the musical world of each "other."

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[9] This is a concept attributed to Susan Willis by Henry Louis Gates in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), xxiii.

[10] See Elizabeth Alexander's introduction to *Collage: An Approach to Reading African-American Women's Literature* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1992), cited in Monson 1994, 289.

> It is important to note that the irony which is implicit in African-American musical aesthetics translates into the breaking of rules which are well-known, what jazz clarinetist Don Byron calls "a certain kind of pull between opposite impulses that you ... see in any good black anything.... A certain kind of inventiveness outside of ... what is [commonly] acceptable."[11]

Along with this, the emergence of a post-structural discourse--one in which the standards by which we judge excellence are viewed as the product of diverse cultural contexts, rather than of one "transcendent universal" system--has opened the way for the recognition of alternative, contextually-situated aesthetic systems. African-American literary scholar, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., in his preface to *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism,* speaks of his gratification upon recognizing that within Afro-American historical tradition there exists "a system of rhetoric and interpretation" which can conceptualize in a meaningful way what happens when divergent cultural traditions combine, coalesce and re-form within individuals (1989, ix). He is, of course, referring to the experience of African Americans, who have for generations used a form of rhetoric called "Signifyin(g)" in which meanings commonly understood within the context of the dominant culture are revised and even inverted. In this process, verbal expression can carry simultaneously more than one set of meanings, and the effectiveness of communication is dependent upon the ability of both communicator and listener to share these levels of meaning.

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[11] Monson 1994, 291.

"Signifyin(g)" is characterized by a sort of verbal play on already-established denotations which opens them up to other interpretations (1989, 51); Gates variously (and interchangeably) refers to these interplays of signification, these transformations, as "reversals" (1989, 63) or "repetition with a signal difference" (1989, 51). In other words, one may use language in ways which alter and/or embellish its traditional meaning--it becomes subject to the interplay of additional levels of meaning accessible to those who understand. And to everyone who is aware of the possibilities, this process involves the *deliberate choice of appropriate meanings*.

Of course, it follows that this principle is applicable also to the "language" of music. In Monson's words, music-making becomes a process in which musicians and their audiences perform and listen from within a "heterogeneous cultural and musical knowledge" regarding "the articulation of particular aesthetics and ideological positions in music" (1994, 311-312). In such a scenario, people respond to various musics in different ways. Each of us, through exposure to alternative styles of music, has become familiar with a variety of styles and genres, and has become adept at assessing and responding to each one in terms of its own ideological and aesthetic criteria.

It is obvious, then, that any genre of music informed by the African-American musical aesthetic cannot accurately be represented as a "subculture" when measured by its success in inverting (and subverting) the hegemonic control of the Western art-music aesthetic. The complexity of the interrelationships between musical styles and genres, coupled with the individuality represented by "listeners and performers from divergent backgrounds" who bring with them "the potential to produce multiple interpretations of the same event" (Monson 1994, 291) and who move with ease and appreciation between contrasting sets of aesthetics, makes this very clear.

In other words, the "shared assumptions" of the "superculture" now include those which define musical virtuosity and meaning according to African-American standards.[12]

This concept has relevance to the experience of congregants at ECWH--white, as well as black. For black gospel is one of the genres in which disparate sets of expectations come into play. Congregants who come from widely differing backgrounds bring with them "divergent cultural knowledges that coexist in particular individuals" (Monson 1994, 311). These individuals apply their own sets of interpretations to the music they hear at the church.

We will be looking at how these conceptual frameworks affect their perception of this music--its aesthetics and its meaning. In other words, what are the qualities of voice, instrumentation and style to which they relate, how do they perceive the importance of text *vis-à-vis* music, and how do they respond to the ambiguity inherent in a musical genre which represents, simultaneously, a religious ministry and a form of entertainment ?

> *You know how black gospel is often built on a blues scale--flat three. That flat three--and this might sound really weird to you--has become a really important note to me because ... there's something about that minor third that's so-o heavy! And it can just take your spirit and pull it into a million directions. Gospel music came from kind of a sad, sorrowful time.... It seems to have come out of sadness mixed with promise and hope and so, to me, that's kind of what black gospel music is....*
> *Classical music is beautiful and there's a purpose for it, and gospel music ... there's a purpose for it. There are so many reasons for music.* (April Dunbar.)

Also, one might add, there are so many ways of appreciating it.

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[12] It is true, however, that this transfer of meaning is, in some sense, incomplete: "shared assumptions" regarding nuances of style are undoubtedly most meaningful to people who also share common cultural experiences.

2.2. Aesthetics

Renée Collins walks quietly up to the front of the sanctuary and stands just below the platform upon which the minister is concluding his sermon. Then her solo begins, unaccompanied. "I come to the garden a-a-lone"; the voice, a strong mezzo-soprano, carries this first melody line through to its highest (and final) note. Here, the pianist joins in with a rumbling arpeggiation undergirding the long, sustained syllable, and from this point on he provides a continuous sonic support to the singer, shifting from harmony to harmony without interruption or significant pause until the end of the song.

This song, "In the Garden," is a hymn familiar to me from my own childhood in a small, rural Baptist church. There, it was sung in a rhymical 6/8 time, its progress marked by a light, regular beat reminiscent of a Viennese waltz (Example 1).[13] *However, the performance this Sunday morning is quite different from those earlier memories. It is neither lilting nor rhythmically predictable. Rather, it moves slowly and deliberately, with spaciousness and metrical freedom, the voice employing stylistic devices--pauses, mid-phrase and even occasional mid-word breaths, and added notes in the form of embellishments--which have the effect of highlighting particular words. The pianist facilitates this process by maintaining a seamless fabric of scale, chord and arpeggio motifs, allowing the soloist the freedom to stretch and condense notes at will.*

The vocalist declaims the words with very clear articulation, employing an almost "punching" delivery. The voice itself has a "grainy" quality and the vibrato, very slight during the quicker notes, becomes much wider and more pronounced on notes that are held longer. The pitch of some notes is approached obliquely, moving through a series of microtones before settling into the middle of the note.

The congregation listens intently, many individuals commenting vocally during the intervals created by sustained vocal notes ("Yes! " "That's right!" "I

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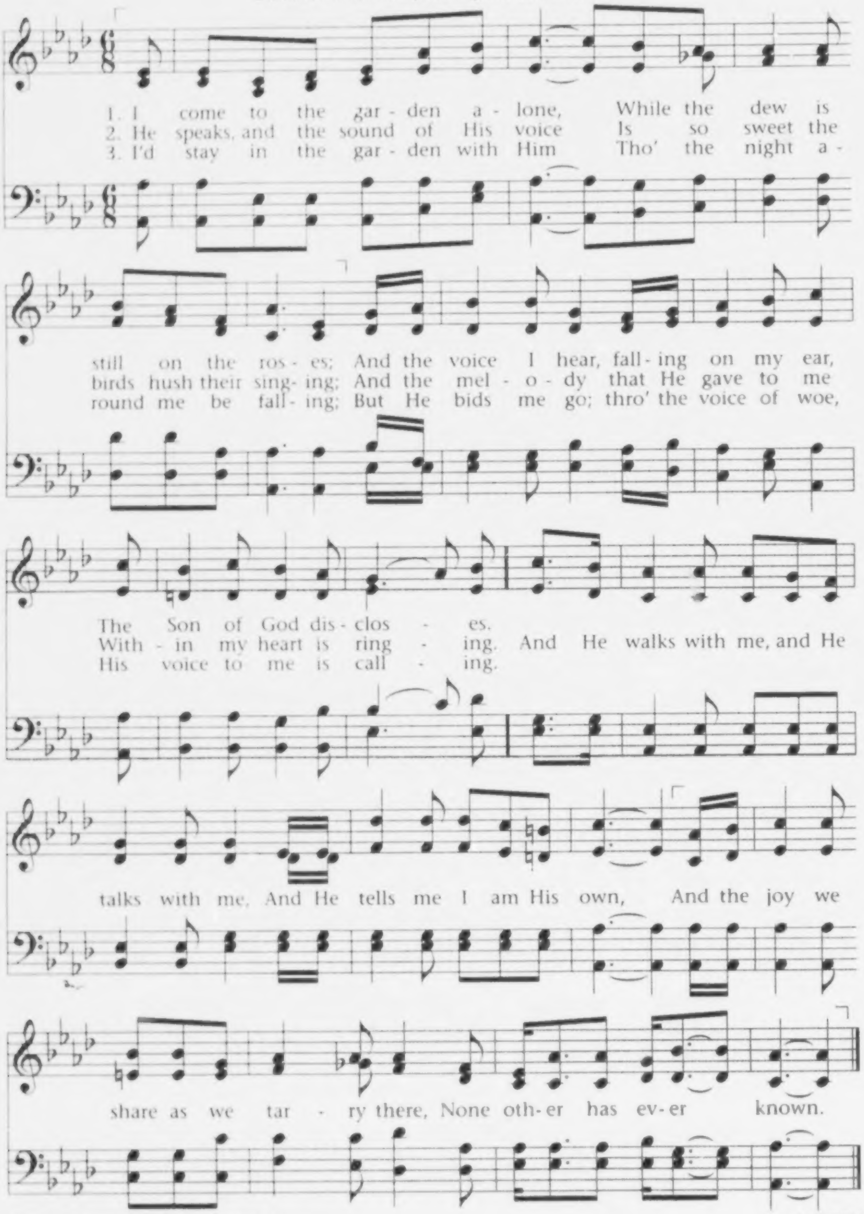
[13] Page 19.

Example 1. From *The Baptist Hymnal*, ed. Wesley L. Forbis (Nashville: Convention Press, 1991). 7th Printing.

FRIEND

187 In the Garden

She turned ... and saw Jesus — John 20:14 NIV


1. I come to the gar - den a - lone, While the dew is still on the ros - es; And the voice I hear, fall - ing on my ear, The Son of God dis - clos - es.
2. He speaks, and the sound of His voice Is so sweet the birds hush their sing - ing; And the mel - o - dy that He gave to me With - in my heart is ring - ing.
3. I'd stay in the gar - den with Him Tho' the night a - round me be fall - ing; But He bids me go; thro' the voice of woe, His voice to me is call - ing.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tar - ry there, None oth - er has ev - er known.

WORDS: C. Austin Miles, 1868-1946
MUSIC: C. Austin Miles, 1868-1946

GARDEN
Irregular

hear ya, Lord!"), among them the minister who interjects at two points, repeating words which have just been sung.[14] *Gradually, people begin to stand, swaying, raising hands and breaking into applause, once at a point midway through the length of the song, and again at the end. The whole process seems less a performance than a communal activity, involving soloist, pianist and congregation in both a corporate expression of praise to God and an affirmation of the ministry of the musicians.*

What are the musical aesthetics which people apply to their assessment of such a performance? It would be absurd to attempt anything like a comprehensive list of "essential qualities" of black gospel since, as postmodern thought emphasizes, the product of such an exercise would likely be inaccurate, illusory, or both. So this discussion will be confined to a consideration of three elements, all having to do with singing rather than instrumentation. They are: voice quality, vocal improvisation and embellishment, and the use of breathing and pitch for emphasis.

I have three reasons for these choices: the first (and perhaps the least significant) is that those congregants who have most clearly shared with me their perceptions regarding the music at ECWH are vocalists--members of the choir and/or song leaders, rather than instrumentalists; in the second place, as a part of the congregation I was able to involve myself in singing--I was also in some sense a participant in the music-making--something I did not do as an instrumentalist;[15] thirdly, and most importantly, all of my consultants at the church, without exception, emphasized the *message* of the music rather more than they did its technique, and this message is embodied in the words of songs. Imamu Amiri Baraka believes that "the whole concept of Afro-American music is hinged on vocal references"[16] and his observation is certainly apposite to the music at ECWH. Singing is the predominant musical activity, whether by a soloist, an ensemble, or the entire congregation. Although instruments are prominently featured in the services, the organ in particular forming an almost ubiquitous accompaniment to songs, prayers, and sermon, one gradually becomes aware that they rarely play for any length of time without reference to a vocal text, either voiced or remembered. Even at transition points of the service, during which the organist improvises "filler" music to connect one activity to another, he most often shifts into a familiar song, joined gradually by the voices of the congregation, who sing as they recognize the melody.

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[14] This practice is described by Rev. Collins as adding "kindling for the fire."

[15] My primary musical identity in Western art forms is that of a pianist.

Conversely, much of the "speaking" in an ECWH service carries elements of music. Some examples will illustrate this.

Generally, extemporaneous prayers are framed in a poetic structure, balanced lines shaped by *crescendo* and *decrescendo* and a pause at the end which "invites" verbal response from the congregation. Line is built upon line in ascending pitch and with increasing intensity until a leveling-out just prior to the "amen."

Similar dynamics govern the occasion on which a member of the pastoral team, Evelyn Ritch, presents a short reflection on a passage from the Old Testament book of Job. Her speaking voice drops into a rhythmic cadence, the phrases defined by distinct pauses during which members of the congregation interject exclamations such as "Praise Jesus," "Thank you, Lord." The following excerpt may be considered representative:

You all have wounds-- (Yes, Lord)

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[16] Imamu Amiri Baraka, "The Jazz Avant-Garde," in *Readings in Black American Music*, ed. Eileen Southern, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company,1983b), 271.

The wounds it is time to let go-- (Praise you, Jesus)
The wounds He will heal if you let Him-- (Thank you, Jesus)[17]

I have often been impressed by the "singing" quality of the last ten or fifteen minutes of the sermon. At this time, the voice of the minister falls into a rhythmic pattern, lifting and dropping an interval of a fourth during each phrase. (Also at the end of each phrase, filling and supporting, is the sound of the organ). The tendency to speak in balanced phrases, rich with imagery, becomes particularly pronounced. Certainly, many of the qualities of the minister's sermon--rhythmic, formulaic, fluent, participatory (responses from the audience becoming increasingly frequent and more fervent)--are also those of the church's music. Pearl Williams-Jones, discussing "Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic," has this to say about the relationship between speech and music in black worship:

> There are two basic sources from which gospel singing has derived its aesthetic ideals: the free-style collective improvisations of the black church congregation and the rhetorical solo style of the black gospel preacher. In seeking to communicate the gospel message, there is little difference between the gospel singer and the gospel preacher in the approach to his subject. The same techniques are used by the preacher and the singer--the singer perhaps being considered the lyrical extension of the rhythmically rhetorical style of the preacher. Inherent in this also is the concept of black rhetoric, folk expressions, bodily movement, charismatic energy, cadence, tonal range and timbre.[18]

Harold Courlander adds that outstanding gospel (as well as blues and jazz) singers often have "foggy, hoarse, rough, or sandy" voices and this quality is also valued because "sermons preached in this type of voice ... create a special emotional tension."[19]

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[17] From the worship service, October 23, 1994.

[18] Pearl Williams-Jones, "Afro-American Gospel Music: A Crystallization of the Black Aesthetic," *Ethnomusicology*, vol. 20, no. 3 (September 1975): 381.

Accordingly, the following descriptions of how one attempts to produce sound according to black aesthetics are apropos to both the preacher and the singer:

> *Black gospel is ... a singing shout.... The vibrato ... is one of the main differences, but it's a vibrato with a "gut" underneath.... There's a quality in [the] voice which is that more than one sound comes out at the same time. Not only do you hear the pitch of the note, but you hear a guttural sound coming in, flavoring the note. And the guttural sound is synonymous with the feeling, because that is where we get the interpretation of the feeling, from the notes. The moan. The groan. The yell and cheer fits in with the note almost like you can hear it, but [it's not produced] separately .... I think that's the soul of the singer.* (Gene McKenzie, a congregant.)

> *It has to do with how you articulate a phrase--a musical phrase--how you get the speed of the vibrato as it's approaching that note. The tension in the vibrato as it's approaching the note--you really feel that you're pushing your way into it.... It's just a subtle, subtle thing.... O.K., so pretend we're going up--we're at a phrase, right? And the point is up here--it could be just three notes--but the way you're moving between and getting to that note is really the thing, because you create more tension, and that's what music really is, tension and release. It goes home, do you know what I'm saying? It has a lot to do with how you push the note out--getting quiet to loud.* (April Dunbar.)

Both of the people quoted above are singers, each has had formal vocal training according to the aesthetics of Western art music, and each has spent much time analyzing and attempting to produce the type of sound associated with black genres, an aspiration they feel is as yet imperfectly realized. The third singer, quoted below, also had formal classical training, but performed as a professional rhythm-and-blues and "show" singer for many years. His analysis is particularly reminiscent of Ingrid Monson's jazz musicians who, far from being untutored "natural" musicians, use their knowledge of "white" genres as "grist for the mill"--as means to a musical end.

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[19] Harold Courlander, *Negro Folk Music, U.S.A.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 23.

> *As far as style is concerned, I could switch from one song to the next, no problem. That's* because *of my training, because I know how to breathe, I know how to open my throat.... I feel that everybody should have some proper training which quite often involves some operatic singing ... so that you know how to breathe, you know how to hold a note, you know how to get your tone. Now if I want to change from sounding too "white" to sounding very "black" ... I just have to place in my mind what I want to do and adjust my throat. The breathing still has to be there...."*
> (Jae Mack, member of the congregation and song leader.)

Jae Mack's familiarity with both classical and blues techniques makes his singing especially versatile and when, as he tells it, he "got tired of that bar all the time," he transferred these skills into the church. But it is important to emphasize that he does not consider formal training to have been a barrier to his acquisition of a so-called "authentically black" sound: to the contrary, he is able to use it as a means to producing both good "black" and "white" sounds.

The descriptions of black vocal techniques on pages twenty-three and twenty-four are remarkably analytical because of the training as well as the personal motivations of these consultants, who illustrate the process by which people, regardless of previous experience or cultural background, can "learn" an appropriate style for a musical genre. Their observations also accurately reflect what happens during the solo performance at ECWH.[20]

"In the Garden" is a hymn built around a central metaphor, one in which the act of praying is likened to walking and talking with God in a garden (see

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[20] Pages 18, 20 of this paper.

Example 1).[21] It was sung at ECWH at the conclusion of a sermon which centred on the Lord's Prayer;[22] to be able to sing this song was a practical demonstration of how the children of God are enabled to relate to Him when they learn to pray according to the pattern which Jesus taught.

2.2.1 Vocal quality

Reference has already been made to the distinctive features by which people identify a "black" sound.[23] These qualities are present when Renée Collins sings; she has a mature voice which can declaim the words of the song with clarity and emphasis. The effect is not one of smoothness or "sweet"-ness; rather, the delivery is dramatic, almost percussive. The vocal tone varies from a spare stridency to a wide vibrato, at times opening out on a higher, longer note to a warm gentleness which, for example, acts to highlight the words "ear" and "voice." Sometimes, alternatively, a high note will be produced by a constriction of the throat which forces out a thin, plaintive tone well-suited to words such as "alone." Often, vowels are characterized by a full "head" tone hinting of nasality. At other times, they are "growled" from the chest, as at the phrase "is ringing."

Each of these devices, in the words of Williams-Jones, "reflect[s] the general aesthetic preference for an intensity which use of the chest voice or open tones can produce." Gospel singers have a repertoire of "vocal color" ranging from "the strident quality of traditional hollers and laments to tonal utterances and nuances in vocal contour *which may be meaningful only to those who are sensitive enough to cultural practices to understand such subtleties"* (Williams-Jones 1975: 381. Italics mine). Consequently, each congregant at ECWH will have a unique level of appreciation corresponding to his or her previous experience, and an individualistic way of describing the sound they hear. This is not to say that the same themes may not reappear in reflections by different people. For example, the comments about the presence of tension in the vibrato of the voice as it approaches a note, described by April Dunbar[24] and referred to by Harold Courlander,[25] correlate in a remarkable way with the musings of Charles Keil about "Motion and Feeling Through Music."[26] Paraphrasing Leonard Meyer, he defines a "masterpiece" as a musical work "in which resistances, uncertainties, tensions, and the overcoming of obstacles manifest themselves most markedly; in good music ... resolutions must be anticipated and patiently awaited; gratifications must be deferred."[27]

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[21] Page 19 of this paper.

[22] Matthew 6: 9-13.

[23] Pages 22-4 of this paper.

This process occurs, in the performance of the soloist at ECWH, when she approaches a "point of rest" (Keil 1994, 73), usually the end of a poetic and musical phrase;[28] the final notes move from a spare, bare sound as the vibrato gradually increases in both speed and width of oscillation until, at the conclusion of the last note, the voice "opens out" into a slow, easy tremolo. At this point, the audience, which has begun murmuring during the progression, seems to collectively "let out its breath," responding with "yes," "that's right," or perhaps with the last word they have just heard. To produce musical resolution through the manipulation of vocal tension and relaxation is to further

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[24] Page 23 of this paper.

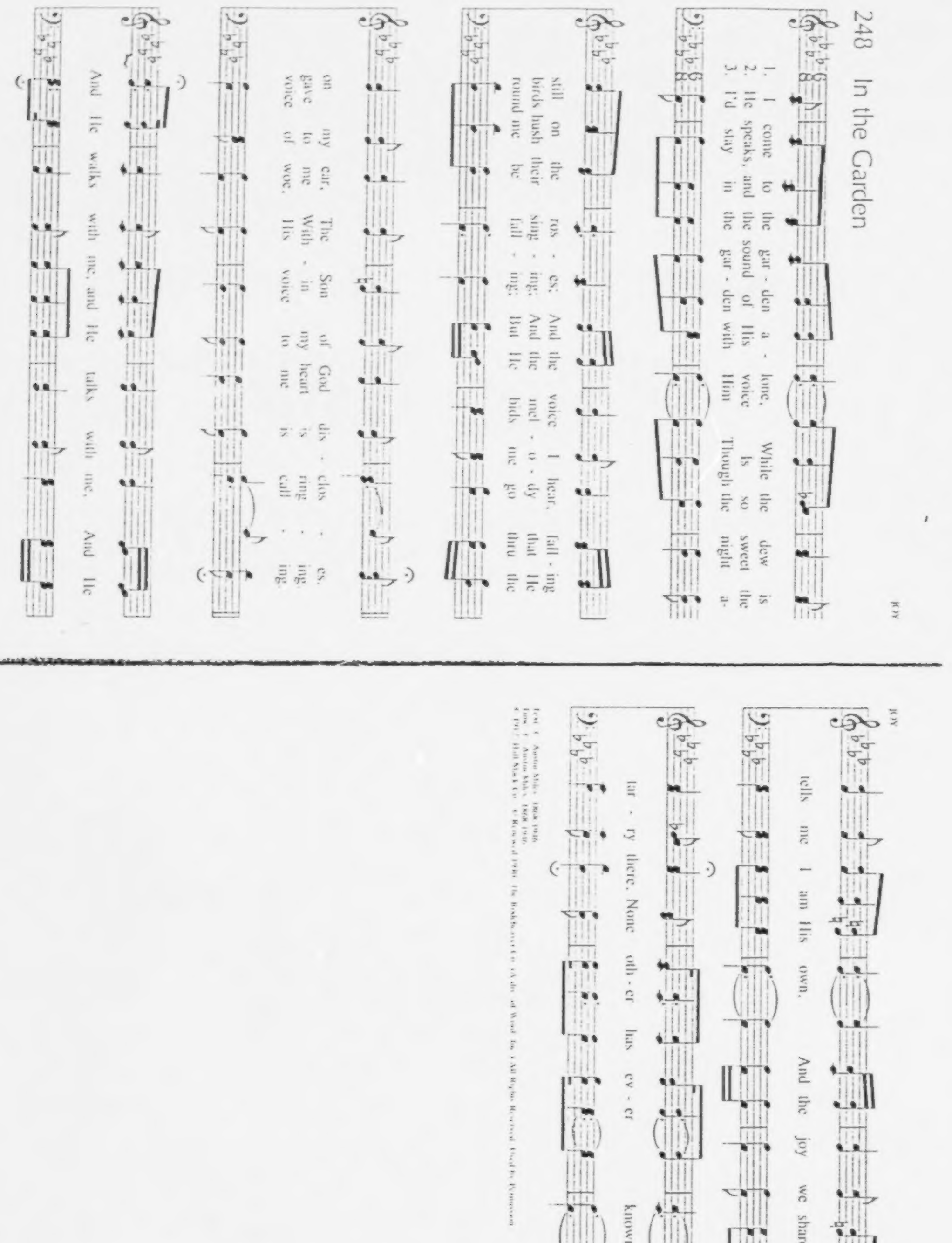
[25] Pages 22-3 of this paper.

[26] Charles Keil, "Motion and Feeling Through Music," in *Music Grooves*, Charles Keil and Steven Feld (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 53-76.

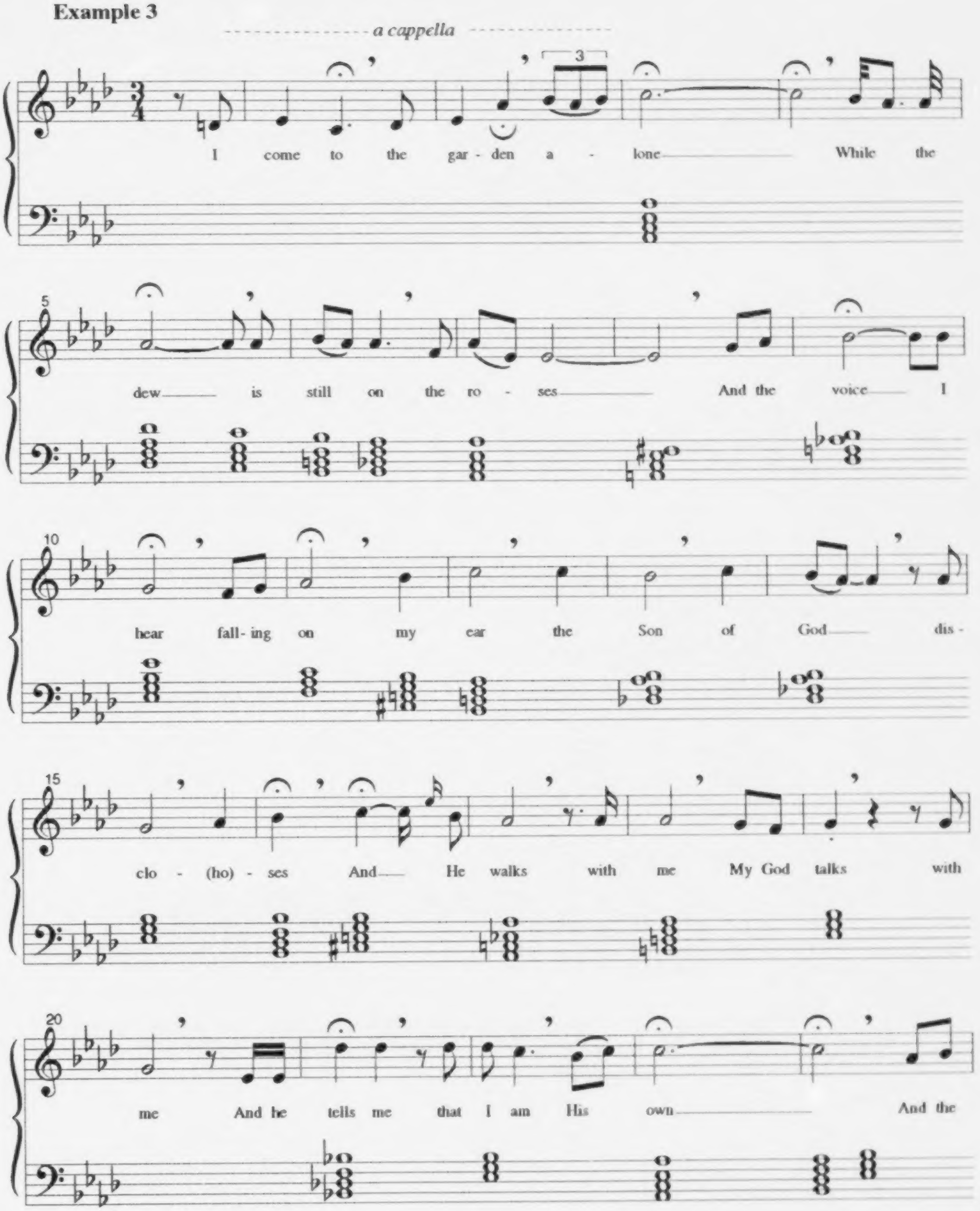
[27] Leonard Meyer, *Music, the Arts, and Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 1, 4, 26, D1, paraphrased by Keil in Keil and Feld 1994, 73.

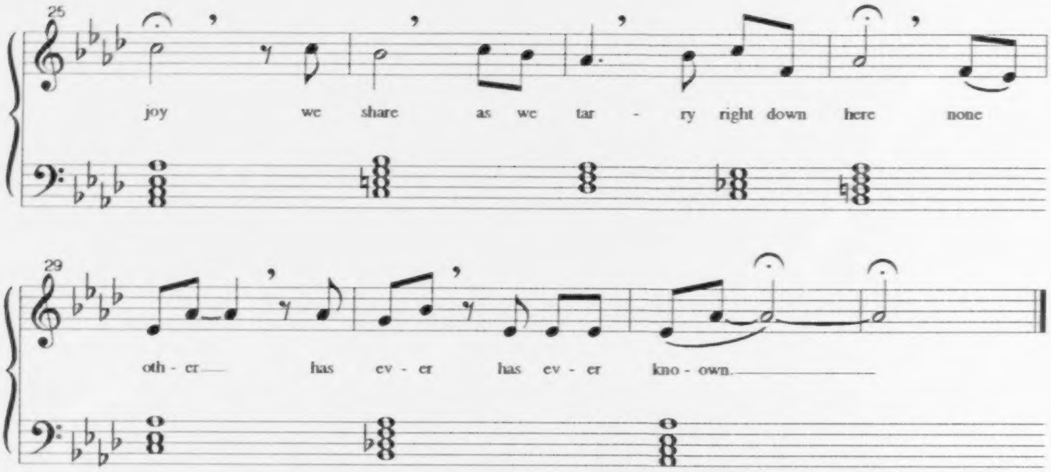
[28] Note Example 2, page 27. This is another arrangement , found in *Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal,* James P. Lyke, Coordinator (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1987). Here, unlike in Example 1,some "points of rest" are indicated (by the fermata); Example 3, pages 28-9, reveals several more in the actual performance.

Example 2. From *Lead Me, Guide Me: The African American Catholic Hymnal*, James P. Lyke, Coordinator (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1987).


248 In the Garden
JOY
1. I come to the gar - den a - lone, While the dew is still on the ros - es; And the voice I hear, fall - ing on my ear, The Son of God dis - clos - es.
2. He speaks, and the sound of His voice Is so sweet the birds hush their sing - ing; And the mel - o - dy that He gave to me With - in my heart is ring - ing.
3. I'd stay in the gar - den with Him Though the night a - round me be fall - ing; But He bids me go thru the voice of woe, His voice to me is call - ing.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me, And He tells me I am His own, And the joy we share as we tar - ry there, None oth - er has ev - er known.

Example 3


a cappella
I come to the gar - den a - lone While the
dew is still on the ro - ses And the voice I
hear fall- ing on my ear the Son of God dis -
clo - (ho) - ses And He walks with me My God talks with
me And he tells me that I am His own And the
5
10
15
20
3

25
joy we share as we tar - ry right down here none
29
oth - er has ev - er has ev - er kno - own.

demonstrate the means by which Afro-American-based musics have inverted musical power relations by the mastery of skills which are also identified as determinants of excellence within the Western Art Music canon.

2.2.2 Improvisation and Embellishment

Williams-Jones speaks of the "individuality" prized by gospel stylists. This is exemplified not only by vocal quality,[29] but by the ability to improvise in a way which produces a satisfactory performance while also expressing the performer's own beliefs and feelings about the subject of the song--that is, it is an indispensable part of the singer's interpretive skills (See Example 3, pages 28-29).

The initial impression one has about this kind of "styling" is its sense of spaciousness. The line, although interrupted by breathing, carries its thought on a stream of sound, the notes marked by pauses sustained not only by the voice, but through a torrent of notes from the piano. These pauses are synonymous, I think, with Charles Keil's "points of rest," which are, in this case, both harmonic and rhythmic; the "resistances and uncertainties" (or tensions) they resolve are "the product of melodic elaborations, usually reinforced with rhythmic deviations" (1994, 73). "Melodic elaborations" and "rhythmic deviations" within the musical line are indicated by my transcription. The harmonic aspect of the pauses is also implied by the chords indicated in the bass clef. (These take the practical form [in the accompaniment] of arpeggiations and chordal improvisations.) The primary intent seems to be to allow the soloist maximum latitude, moment by moment, to "color" the text of the song by expanding or contracting note values, adding words, and "ornamenting" notes as she wills or, perhaps, "as the Spirit moves."

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[29] The qualities of voice demonstrated by Renée Collins are readily recognizable as being common to black gospel; however, it should be noted that other singers have been described as having a "quasi-preaching" style, or the flavor of "country gospel," or the style of rockers or balladeers or "shouters." The variety is rich and subject to constant interplay and metamorphosis. For further information, see Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1983a), 457-74.

In so doing, she involves other members of the congregation in her performance, by providing time at these pauses, or junctures, for their verbal and kinesthetic responses. Such responses are, in a very real sense, also part of the aesthetic of embellishment as practised in black gospel. They may represent an affirmation of the relevance of the song's message to a person's own circumstances, they may indicate a recognition of the singer's skill in touching us emotionally, or they may be merely a means of involving oneself in another communal act of worship. Very likely, they function in all three ways, reflecting the value placed in African-American musical genres on audience participation; there are times when it seems impolite or inappropriate to listen without response. As Williams-Jones notes, "passive audience attitudes are Western European aesthetic norms" (1975, 383).

At ECWH, each member and visitor is confronted by the necessity to determine the level of response with which he or she feels comfortable; (I was strongly aware of this during my initial visits to ECWH, when I felt restrained from any kind of overt response by my own lack of familiarity with what was appropriate--that is, with the timing and nature of response; at the same time, there were in operation both implicit and explicit cues inviting participation); here, too, the interplay of conflicting aesthetic standards which "coexist in particular individuals" (Monson 1994, 311) must be resolved.

2.2.3. Definition Through Breathing and Pitch

In Example 3, I have tried to indicate the places where breaths (or at least an interruption of the sustained voice) occur. Looking at the transcription, one might expect the song to sound disjointed or choppy as a consequence. In reality, though, the contour of each musical line is preserved by a dramatic intensity which flows across the breaks. This breathing is not accidental; one senses an underlying rhythmical concept.

> *There's rhythm underneath it. The spacing stretches out, but underneath there's still the driving rhythm constantly. That is the difference! That is the culture.* (Gene McKenzie.)

Williams-Jones concurs with the perception that this is part of a cultural aesthetic:

> An essential element in gospel singing technique is a breathiness in tone production which adds a certain emotional intensity to the performance. Breathing between words and short phrases is not considered improper to the idiom. The audible breath intake and expulsion of air acts as a rhythmic factor and is an essential part of black timing and rhythmic pacing.... It is a distinctive ethnic phenomenon firmly rooted in tradition.[30]

(Here, as well, reference can be made to the antiphony created by the interplay of solo line with instrumental accompaniment, the whole overlaid and overlapped by responses from the congregation. All of these elements fit into a rhythmic structure providing continuity within a song and representing familiarity to those who regularly worship in this manner.)

This breathing technique, the marker of a cultural style, is most important because of its effectiveness in highlighting the meaning of the words. The leisurely, carefully "set-apart" quality of spacing presents each short phrase, as well as some individual words, for examination and reflection.

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[30] Williams-Jones 1975, 382.

Serving much the same purpose--the emphasis of textual significance--is the treatment of pitch:

> *Pitch is important, but--it's soul sound. They don't hit the pitch and stay there. They'll hit the pitch anytime within a time limit to let you know where the note goes. But they don't stay there. In white music you hit the pitch and you have to hold it and maintain it and embellish on that pitch.... You can't vary on it. But if you sing [black] solo, you swoop up to the pitch, you hit the pitch and let them know where you're going and you swoop around and down and you carry on.* (Gene McKenzie.)

This speaker also refers to "singing past" the tonal quality of the note, while April Dunbar describes manipulating pitch in the following way in order to convey intensity:

> *Sometimes ... when I get to that note and push it just slightly sharp --just a little sharp--people might say, "Oh, that sounds awful," but if you really know, that person means that note so much that they're just overdoing it, just pulling it beyond its limits. So take it a little bit sharp and it's just enough to [blow your spirit away].*

In a certain sense, this can be considered one aspect of the singer's improvisational skills. Stephen Henderson explains the practice of "worrying the line," which he defines as:

> ... the folk expression for the device of *altering pitch of a note* in a given passage or for other kinds of ornamentation often associated with melismatic singing in the Black tradition.[31] (Italics mine.)

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[31] Stephen Henderson, et al, *Understanding the New Black Poetry* (New York: William Morrow and Co, Inc., 1973), 41.

Williams-Jones further elaborates: this is common in slow gospel songs, and "allows the maximum opportunity for the inventiveness of the soloist in improvisation and building an emotional climax" (1975, 383).[32]

The emotional climax, at ECWH, serves a particular purpose, articulated by April Dunbar in the following way:

> *I've been at both ends. I've been very much into ... music when I wasn't a Christian and ... when I used to get excited about music, it was a totally different feeling than when you feel what happens with God. So if I'm just getting excited because it's just so cool, and then I really feel a closeness with God through the music and feel His presence and* I feel the meaning of what's trying to be conveyed to me in the music--*that's where I think the difference is.*

"The meaning of what's trying to be conveyed to me in the music"--the message--that is the motivation, within the context of the church, for the use of all of these stylistic devices: the expression of intensity through the way the voice is produced, the pitch-bending, and the manipulation of rhythm and melody. Although discussed in relation to a solo, it should be noted that these same aesthetic elements are also present in other vocal ensembles, choirs and congregational singing. In the latter, for example, the melody may be sung by the "big choir" (congregation) while one or more of the songleaders provides a counterpoint of melismatic improvisation, and both choir and congregation share the distinctive timbre and the almost "thick" pitch produced by the combination of myriad individual approaches to the tonal centre of a note.

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[32] A recent recording by Kathleen Battle, operatic soprano, accompanied by Christian McBride, jazz bassist, features a remarkable performance of the spiritual, "Hush, Hush," in which both voice and bass "circle around" the centre of note pitches before settling into them. This playful manipulation of pitch is certainly deliberate and, I think, extraordinarily beautiful. See Kathleen Battle, *So Many Stars*, Sony Classical SK 68473 recording, 1995.

These aesthetic qualities are all-pervasive, but do not represent the only lens through which the music at ECWH can be examined. As we were reminded by April Dunbar, in the context of a church, where "message" is paramount, it is the meaning expressed by the music which is even more significant.

2.3 The Process of Interpretation

How is one to discuss meaning in this context? In what manner may the unique experiences of individual congregational members be articulated within a conceptual frame which, while giving form to commonalities in spiritual and musical perceptions, also allows for the presence of anomaly and ambiguity?

In this study, it is obvious that I draw upon the verbalizations of people *about* music, not only upon my own experience of the music itself. Steven Feld reminds us that, in such an exercise, "one engages and places an item or event in meaningful social space" through an ongoing process of interpretation, but this action "do[es] not fix or freeze a single meaning"; rather, all of us who listen and share our perceptions are involved in an "emergent" process of "making meanings."[33] We do this by means of "interpretive moves" (1994, 92) which serve to "foreground and background experience and knowledge in relation to the ongoing perception of a sound object or event" (1994, 88). These "moves" are rapid and probably unconscious. In other words, our prior experiences and knowledge contribute to a sort of continuous reappraisal of what we see and hear. Relative importances shift kaleidoscopically--in some sense, the whole process is one of *successive and repetitive inversions* during which certain significances advance and recede with the coming to bear of new perceptions.

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[33] Steven Feld, "Communication, Music, and Speech About Music," in Keil and Feld 1994, 93.

Feld's conceptual framework therefore provides a method for examining how people's expectations, whether pertaining to aesthetics, belief, or behaviour (and including Ingrid Monson's "divergent cultural knowledges that coexist in ...individuals" [1994, 311]) can shape the way they currently listen. Conversely, the manner in which they listen in the future will be shifted and reshaped in further response to their present experience. Even within the same performance, a person's evaluative processes are in a constant state of flux, and assessments are made and revised in accordance with whatever set of expectations becomes momentarily foregrounded. Viewed in this way, it is not surprising that, for example, individuals will be moved to either tears or applause by a performance, while at the same time they minimize the "entertainment" aspect of the music. Nor should we wonder at the paradox represented by people who have initially been drawn to the church in large part because of what they have heard about the music, but who then demonstrate less interest in discussing the music as "pure music" than in emphasizing the textual content of the songs. They are not being dishonest or inconsistent--rather, the greater or lesser significance of aspects of their present experience is constantly being processed (and reprocessed) in relation to what are sometimes conflicting *a priori* value systems that affect their interpretations of meaning.

Feld applies his interpretive moves to the juncture where the listening "object" (i.e. the music) intersects with the listener (1994, 78); this is the point at which the action can be "frozen" and the complex interplay of associations, reflections, and evaluations in some sense opened up to examination. I would suggest that, as a result of my conversations with members of the congregation, the process of articulating meaning has become even more complicated. In the first place, my consultants are both performers and listeners and, as a result, *their* impressions are colored by the experience of conveying musical meaning as well as receiving it. Secondly, my own comprehension is susceptive to several sets of perceptual frames: those which I utilize as a listener to (and a participant in) the music; and other, divergent ones represented by each of the persons to whom I talk. (It is probable, of course, that the exercise of examining their own experiences in the light of my questions has caused similar perceptual shifts in all of them).

My awareness of this process of experiential diffusion leads me to apply Feld's system of analysis primarily to my own interpretive experience, incorporating the insights of other people insofar as they have become interwoven with and, over time, almost indistinguishable from my own. (I was reminded of this while refreshing my memory through a re-examination of my early fieldnotes and papers and of my interview transcriptions--I realize that I no longer participate or observe in quite the same way. I have been changed by the process).

Feld proposes that we consider the action of listening in terms of five general categories of "interpretive moves." The *locational* move positions a musical object in relation to the listener's own identity and experience (1994, 86). For example, how I heard "In the Garden," as sung by Renée Collins, was affected by all of my previous musical encounters with the same song. As a white woman whose childhood religious experience was within a small-town fundamentalist church, I first remember this song as a solo sung, even then, only by people who were much older than I. It always seemed to me to be in some sense "old-fashioned," in that the regular waltz-like rhythm and "garden" metaphor carried a hint of sentimentality, something which was, of course, anathema to a young person concerned with "coolness." In those earlier performances, I would have sat quietly, enduring until the end (or, occasionally, providing the accompaniment, all the time aware of the latent danger of falling into a sort of "oom-pa-pa" rhythm). Certainly, I would not have applauded at any point: in the first place, this was never done in my church--implicit was the assumption that applause brought glory to the singer rather than to God; as well, I was never "involved" enough to respond in any overt way. Passivity was the standard response.[34] This aspect of my experience is not particularly unique; it was echoed by another congregant who received her early spiritual training in Nazarene and Pentecostal churches, in all of which hers was the only black family:

> *I was a very quiet worshipper until I came under that different kind of a worship (at ECWH) ... and it frees you up.... You're not so constrained any more and you go out feeling refreshed.* (Marlene Brown, member of the congregation and administrative secretary.)

Another worshipper, a black man, told of an incident in which he was involved. He once interrupted a service in a white church, in which he was a first-time visitor, to ask if a particular hymn could be sung a second time. His action was deemed so unusual that it was reported in the weekly newspaper. In my church, as well, such departure from the prescribed program would not have been encouraged.

At the same time as I remembered earlier musical encounters with "In the Garden," I was *categorizing* it (Feld 1994, 86), placing it within the rubric of "old gospel hymns," written during the later-nineteenth or early-twentieth century; distinguished on one hand from hymns with a more venerable history, such as the ones written by Martin Luther and Charles Wesley; and, on the other, from so-called "contemporary" gospel songs and "choruses" which began making an appearance in the 1940's. The latter were a staple of the churches I attended, while the former also retained a position there, representing tradition and orthodoxy. Gospel hymns of the vintage of "In the Garden," however, dropped out of favour. Consequently, I don't remember any performances of it during the intervening years, nor was it often sung as a congregational hymn, although it could be found in hymnbooks.

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[34] See page 31 of this paper for comment by Williams-Jones.

These historical remembrances became part of the *associational* moves (Feld 1994, 87) I experienced while listening to Renée Collins's solo. Feld suggests that we may often imagine another rendition of the same tune, and certainly I remembered earlier performances and visualized the printed form of the words and music as I listened, with a resulting awareness of every deviation from what had been my "norm."

The deviations themselves had a curiously disorienting effect on me and, more than anything else, made me aware of the interplay of different and sometimes conflicting expectations. At times, when I had become deeply involved in observing the (to me) unusual techniques of breathing and improvisation, my attention would abruptly shift to the nuance of a word and I would focus momentarily on the textual import. Simultaneously, the mental image of its physical representation would be playing throughout like a movie. The process of shifting juxtapositions of multiple associations was often distracting and, at times, almost overwhelming. My senses were being bombarded with unfamiliar sounds, images and movements, and the effort required in the attempt to make meaning of them all--of, in some way, imposing order upon them--was enormous. (My experience has on occasion been echoed by that of other people who have spoken of their initial difficulty in focusing on worship when confronted by so many differences). It should be noted that this performance occurred very early in my association with the church. Subsequent exposure has blurred the boundaries of difference, rendering familiar and comfortable what was once strange and/or unpredictable. As well, the music ministry has itself changed over time:

> *We used to sing a lot of songs where there were a lot more people up and dancing almost in the aisles, and still we do that to a point but I find that we've graduated, that we're into a different way of getting the gospel message across.... Different people are listening. Some people will be spoken to by a soft quiet song--other people, they need something more. But whatever it is, we want to minister to everyone and not just one particular group of people, and I think that's where we're [moving] ... into more different songs.... And some songs have more of the anointing than others--you're just centred on God, Jesus.* (Marlene Brown.)

Marlene Brown's observation is consistent with the views of Reverend Collins who, in an interview in November, 1995, expressed a desire for the church to reflect a "balance"--recognizing the inevitability of change and even adopting a proactive approach to it, while maintaining, in his words, "the distinctives that brought us here, that have kept us." It seems that the juggling of disparate sets of expectations, and the interplay of what Ingrid Monson calls "divergent cultural knowledges" (1994, 311), is in actuality part of the agenda of the church.

All of this has resulted in my own *reflection* (Feld 1994, 87) about "similar and dissimilar," pertaining not only to the techniques of performance, but also to the process of interpretation. For, while Renée Collins sang, widely differing sets of associations and expectations were being brought to bear upon this one song by people with different histories. Some, like the woman quoted below, have been shaped by years of moving from church to church:

> *I see ECWH specifically for me at this point in time, as being my time to be led by still waters. I find it a resting place.* (Linda Peko Campbell, member of the congregation.)

Others have echoed a similar sentiment to this:

> *When I first came into the church, it was the sense of coming home--It's like, "I'm finally home. This is where I belong." And it took all that time for me to get to that place.... This is where God wants me to be because it identifies with my roots and everything I come from.* (Marlene Brown.)

Both of these women are African Canadians, born in Edmonton, and their descriptions of ECWH's significance as a special "time and place" for them was intensely moving to me; although not black, I was, in a limited way, able to incorporate their imageries into my own conceptual framework. (These became further sets of shifting lenses generating momentary impressions as I participated in worship).

Their expectations regarding gospel music have also expanded my own understanding of the variance of musical experience:

> *We're encouraged to clap [in the Bible]--I believe that God intended for us to use our whole body in praising Him.... He tells us to clap our hands, he tells us to shout unto God, He tells us different things to let us know that He wants us to express ourselves--and invites us to do so.... Worship is a response to what you hear, a response to what you know, a response to what you discern, a response to what you hope for, what you have faith in, what you believe in [and it's something that can be seen?]. Yeah.... When God has done something for you, you have to respond--it's natural.* (Linda Peko Campbell.)

> *There is a difference between someone who knows God and what God has done for them and somebody that's just singing to be singing a song--there is a different quality. When a person is moved by the Spirit, and the anointing is on them, it lifts you to a different plane and it makes you want to worship God and just get out of yourself and forget about everything and just centre on God.... The music can soothe you and whatnot, but it's the concentrating on the words that you're singing, what the words are saying to you personally.* (Marlene Brown.)

These two concepts--that worship always involves response, and that the quality of one's spiritual experience is determined by motivation rather than by technique--are not particularly revolutionary. But when they are considered synchronically, within the context of a church service where response is avowedly and overwhelmingly overt, involving physical movement and verbal antiphony between the leader and the congregation, their implications may be revolutionary. They redefine the whole concept of worship, reconfiguring its parameters to include behavior not immediately recognizable to one who has been taught to equate respect with silence and worship with passivity. To recognize the similar (the desire to worship) in the different (the practice of worship) was to allow myself to become open to a new freedom in spiritual experience.

These interpretive nuances were only very dimly articulated at the time of Renée Collins's solo. But already, early in my study of black gospel, this event provided a practical demonstration of the power of contrasting aesthetic and interpretive "languages," formulated through distinctive cultural experiences, to bring renewal to our understandings of music. I particularly recall the "setting up" of the song. Reverend Collins had introduced it by quoting the words of all three verses (including the one which he identified as his favorite--verse three); and he concluded by saying:

> *Back home, where I come from, mothers had it another way. They said, "I went to the valley to pray, and my soul 'got happy' and I stayed all day."*[35]

By thus situating it in a time and place of good and significant memories for him, (unlike my own), he undeniably influenced my own re-listening.

In the words of Erving Goffman, each "hearing" has "a biography and a history" which have implications for remembered, present, and future musical experiences.[36] "Historicity [is] embedded in music events as process" (Monson 1994, 309), and certainly the history of this specific hearing has entered my store of memories and will flavor all of my future listenings. As well, it has affected my *evaluation* (Feld 1994, 87) of both "In the Garden" and the aesthetics of black gospel informing this particular performance of it. The connotations suggested to me by the song have been modified--it has, in a very real sense, become "cool" because of my own "social [re]construction of meaningful listening through interpretive moves" (Feld 1994, 89).

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[35] From a sermon by Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr., October 29, 1995.

2.4 Conclusion

It should be clear that this discussion of "the music" of ECWH is not primarily concerned with reference to a "fixed incarnation" of essential characteristics which serve to distinguish it from all other genres of religious expression. Rather, the church is the space within which diverse cultural histories, internalized as the experience of unique individuals, meet and commingle--sometimes affirming prior experience, sometimes presenting alternatives, and occasionally challenging cherished assumptions. It is, to use Houston Baker's imagery, a place of "juncture," or "intersection":

> The singer and his production are always at this intersection, this crossing, ... providing resonance for experience's multiplicities. Singer and song never arrest transience--fix it in "transcendent form." Instead they provide expressive equivalence for the juncture's ceaseless flux. Hence they may be conceived as translators.[37]

What is the experience that is in the process of being translated at ECWH?

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[36] Erving Goffman, "The Interaction Order," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1983): 2.

[37] Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 7.

If, as Mellonee Burnim and Portia Maultsby claim, "the principles underlying the performance" of all black music genres "remain the same" (1987, 133),[38] then the following observations of George Lipsitz about blues and jazz are equally applicable to gospel:

> Black cultural forms ... inverted the prestige hierarchies of white supremacy. The multi-cultural origins of jazz and blues [and gospel] performers demonstrate the importance of Black culture in combating the segregation that shapes so many areas of American life.... [They] also offer alternatives to dominant ideologies about connections between culture and social relations.... [Gospel] musicians ... play music that tries to change life, to make an audience move, rather than just realizing abstract technical goals.[39]

Trying to "change life"--this is arguably the mission of any Christian church. If Lipsitz is correct, black gospel is particularly well equipped to accomplish this. And perhaps the changing of lives is the greatest transformation of all--the ultimate inversion:

> *We don't like going out the same way we came in. We want to have met with God and know that things have been taken care of.* (Marlene Brown.)

> *In any church you go to, if you don't feel better when you come out than when you went in, there was no sense in you going in the first place.* (Jae Mack.)

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[38] Page 11 of this paper.

[39] George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (London: Verso, 1994), 179.

Chapter Three

DETERMINING RELIGIOUS MEANING

3.1 "Repetition with a Signal Difference"

Jeff Titon, in his intensive study of the worship patterns of an Appalachian Baptist church, has examined the relationship of music to other media involved in religious practice. He concludes:

> Music is a part of a system of communication involving speech, chant, and song:... One way of coming to understand musical performances--the best way, I believe--is to see them as part of a system of performances, some musical, some non-musical ... singing ... praying, preaching, teaching, and testifying.... While the performers make distinctions among [performance] genres, they hold a special *theory of language and communication that underlies and unites all genres.*[40] (Italics mine.)

The validity of Titon's observation has become increasingly apparent to me during my months at Edmonton Community Worship Hour. Just as there is a powerful musical aesthetic underlying the practice of song and speech arts at ECWH, so, too, there is a pervasive "spiritual language," common to sermons, stories, prayers, and music. ECWH's "theory of communication" embraces, I believe, not only statements of creed or belief, but also the practice style of all of the performance genres, as well as the idiom of expression. And ultimately, within all of these, there is a singularity, a certain interplay of familiarity and variance, that has made the church meaningful to so many people: that is, the "message" that believers hear is consistent with the belief system--the orthodoxy--that already frames their religious experience, but there is a "difference" which ministers in a special way to those who choose to participate.

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[40] Jeff Todd Titon, *Powerhouse For God: Speech, Chant, and Song in an Appalachian Baptist Church* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), xv.

I have spoken to people for whom the music of gospel has a powerful emotional impact, and to others who are relatively unmoved by it. But all have emphasized the significance to their own religious experience of the "word," by which they mean the underlying "message," articulated through preaching and echoed by all of the other "performance genres." This message is expressed through a spiritual discourse, meaningful to each of them, of which music is but one manifestation.

Who are these people touched by the ministry of ECWH? What has led them individually, both white and black, to unite in worship which, while fundamentally African-American in style, resonates with haunting familiarity for Afro-Canadians and Euro-Canadians? What is the system of "language and communication" conveying meaning to each one? And how is black gospel music a vehicle for the expression of this "language"?

All of these questions can best be examined by locating both the church and its members within the context of North American Protestantism.

3.2 The Language of Theology

Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr., has a Master's degree from Southern Baptist Biblical Studies Centre in Georgia and, until he founded Edmonton Community Worship Hour, ministered in Baptist churches. It should not be surprising, therefore, that the theology of ECWH is recognizably Baptist, with a resultant familiarity to people, such as myself, whose religious history includes churches espousing a similar belief system. In the early stages of my study, when I was unaccustomed to many of the performance practices, the "differences" seemed initially to be those of style rather than of substance, and it was only after several conversations with other congregants that I realized my own perceptions were not synonymous with theirs--our understanding of the meaning inherent in the "message" was affected by our familiarity with the manner of its presentation.

One of my consultants at ECWH related an incident in which another person had referred to the church as "Bapti-costal" (the reference is to Baptist and Pentecostal); I conjectured that this might appropriately be defined as "Baptist with a little more life." However, subsequent investigation reveals my observation to have been facile--the interrelationship is infinitely more complex.

Jeff Titon, in discussing the Appalachian Baptists among whom he worked, subsumes them under the general heading of "folk religion," under which rubric he would also include Pentecostals (1988, 144-9); in so doing, he provides us with a framework in which to explore the facets of "similar and dissimilar" implicit in the term "Bapti-costal."

Titon first defines folk religion in terms of its contrast to "official religion"; the latter is distinguished by its association with a "society's power structure," which in the United States can be equated, he says, with membership in "Judaism, Catholicism, or one of the major [mainline] Protestant denominations" (1988, 146-7). Official religion also "contains a fusion of faith and patriotism" (Titon 1988, 145)--the combining of personal faith with "a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" that Robert N. Bellah calls "civil religion." Bellah further observes,

> The God of the civil religion is not only rather "unitarian," he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love.[41]

Folk religion, by contrast, "is not so much opposed to official religion as apart from it" (Titon 1988, 146). It is not aligned with the civil power structure, nor with mainline denominations, but is concerned with fellowship within its own "belief" boundaries. By extension, ECWH, which has been independent of all denominational ties since its inception, could (measured by this standard) once have been defined as "folk." However, the church is now in the process of becoming a member of the Congregational Christian Churches of Canada, a denomination having a long Canadian history, including the merger of many of its churches with those of the Methodists and Presbyterians to form the United Church of Canada.[42] Accordingly, ECWH's status as a "folk church," if determined only by this criterion, is tentative at best.

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[41] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," in *Religion North American Style*, ed. Patrick H. McNamara (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1984), 47.

However, the relevance of this categorization to our discussion is as an aid to theological (rather than demographic) definition. "Experiential religion" and the "conversion experience" have characterized Christian "folk" religion since the Reformation (Titon 1988, 143) and Titon cites William Clements who, in a 1974 study, identified certain traits commonly present in folk Protestant churches.[43] (Titon says that it is not necessary for any one church to exhibit all of these traits in order to be considered "folk," and I will confine this discussion to those having relevance to ECWH.) According to Clements, such congregations share the following distinctions: they espouse a literal interpretation of scripture, stress God's providence in man's affairs, emphasize evangelism (stressing the necessity for a personal conversion experience) and rigorous moral standards, and are characterized by informality and emotionalism (1974, 20). Titon adds two other signs: an emphasis on oral tradition, and a "demonstrative, improvised performance style" (1988, 147).

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[42] Note also that Congregationalists in the United States were among the religious groups most concerned about the early religious instruction of slaves (see Southern 1983a, 36).

[43] William M. Clements, "The American Folk Church: A Characterization of American Folk Religion Based on Field Research among White Protestants in a Community in the South Central United States." Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1974.

It is intriguing that these characteristics of doctrine and practice apply equally well to ECWH, whose membership is predominantly black and urban, and to Titon's congregation--exclusively white and rural. He also refers to the practice among white Appalachian Baptists (although certainly not restricted to them) of chanted preaching, so similar to, and perhaps derivative of, the black preaching style (1988, 309). Obviously, many key tenets of belief and custom are shared by both black and white denominations having roots in American "folk" Protestantism, among them Baptists and Pentecostals. The significance to us here does not lie primarily in *how* such cross-cultural diffusion occurred in the context of American churches practising a *de facto* segregation; but rather, in the fact that it *did* occur and, because of this, many black and white Christians share a commonality, not only of religious belief, but also of certain aspects of practice. The importance of this is stressed by Titon:

> Two congregations identical in doctrine may diverge in performance style, and a believer will feel comfortable in one but not another because of it .[44]

3.3 The "Language" of Performance

The concept of "folk church" (or "sanctified church") is also present in Eileen Southern's lucid summary of the development of the postbellum black church, in which she situates both Baptists and Pentecostals within a structure determined by musical performance style:

> During the post-Civil War period new denominations, founded by Baptists and Methodists who had left the traditional churches, began to appear among the ex-slaves. *In regard to musical performance*, these denominations fall loosely into two groups: Those that followed, more or less, the conventions and procedures of the mother churches, black or white, and those that struck out in

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[44] Titon 1988, 147.

> new directions reflecting the strength of African traditions. An example of the former was the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church; examples of the latter were the various Holiness and sanctified sects, which some scholars call "folk church".... In the early twentieth century Baptist as well as pentacostal [sic] churches were to be counted among the folk churches.... According to the evidence, the musical practices of the slave "invisible church" were passed on to the post-emancipation folk churches with full vigor: the hand-clapping, foot stomping, call-and-response performance, rhythmic complexities, persistent beat, melodic improvisation, heterophonic textures, percussive accompaniments, and ring shouts.[45] (Italics mine.)

Reference has already been made, in Chapter One, to the presence of many of these "musical practices" in the services at ECWH, and I would emphasize that *all* of them, with the single exception of the ring shouts,[46] are much in evidence there, whether as elements of performance or during congregational singing. They have thus become part of the "spiritual practice" of white and black Canadians who, at first glance, appear to have very little connection to either rural American Baptists or the postbellum black church. The relevant key to an understanding of their relationship is, I believe, to be found in Pentecostalism.

Perhaps the most dramatic example of cross-cultural religious influence by African Americans on Euro-American-dominated society was the founding of the Pentecostal movement by black Baptists (notably Rev. W.J. Seymour) in Los Angeles, California, in 1906.

> Several of the ... church fathers participated in the Azusa Street Revival, 1906-9, at Los Angeles under the leadership of William J. Seymour. There they "received the gift of the Holy Spirit," and their congregations ... became a part of the general pentacostal

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[45] Southern 1983a, 445-6.

[46] The early "ring shouts" were black Christian dance improvisations featuring singing, hand-shaking, swaying bodies, and movement (in a circle) in time with the music; a reminiscence of this custom can perhaps be seen in the practice at ECWHof making the offertory a processional involving a circuit of the church by all participants, to the accompaniment of instruments and singing.

> movement established by Seymour, who was formerly a minister of the AME [African Methodist Episcopal] church.
>
> The influence of African traditions upon religious ritual was more in evidence here than in any of the other churches of the period-- ... holy dancing, speaking in tongues, improvisatory singing, and use of drums and other percussive instruments. Obviously the pentacostal churches fell direct heir to the shouts, hand-clapping and foot-stomping, jubilee songs, and ecstatic [experiences] ... of the plantation "praise houses."[47]

Pentecostalism thus became, in the words of African-American theologian Cornel West, "the only denomination of the Christian faith founded by black people."[48] There is some controversy about these origins, "a study of several classical pentecostal writers on the issue of the founding of the contemporary pentecostal movement reveal[ing] for the most part a denominational bias and an apparent omission of the role of blacks."[49] In spite of this, all of the sources I consulted mention Seymour (although he is not always identifed as black) and Charles Fox Parham, the founder of small Bible colleges in Topeka, Kansas and Houston, Texas:[50]

> Charles Fox Parham was white, but the pioneer leader of pentecostalism--as a full-fledged movement--was a black man, a ... former slave named William Joseph Seymour, who was (for a short time) one of Parham's students in Houston.[51]

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[47] Southern 1983a, 260.

[48] Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance: An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 149. West cites James S. Tinney, "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," *Christianity Today* (Oct. 8, 1971): 4-6, and Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co. 1976), 25-51.

[49] Leonard Lovett, "Black Origins of the Pentecostal Movement," in *Aspects of Pentecostal-Charismatic Origins,* ed. Vinson Synan (Plainfield, New Jersey: Logos International, 1975), 130.

[50] For a partial list of pertinent sources, see the bibliography, pages 97-8.

[51] Richard Quebedeaux, *The New Charismatics, II: How a Christian Renewal Movement Became Part of the American Religious Mainstream* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 28.

These beginnings were integrated, black and white believers being united in this new movement.

> Churches serving a predominantly black constituency have played an important part in the whole pentecostal movement. William Seymour, a black holiness preacher, became pastor of a small group of former Baptists at what became the first pentecostal center in Los Angeles, where the famous Azusa Street revival occurred. *Early attempts at racial inclusiveness* failed within a few years, and black churches were segregated, pushed to the edge of the movement as a whole. The Pentecostal Assembles of the World ... has been the most successful at keeping a limited degree of racial inclusiveness over the years.[52] (Italics mine.)

The Pentecostal movement has always been distinguished by a certain amount of integration and non-sectarianism. Through a more recent Neo-Pentecostalism, demonstrative, experiential worship has become a hallmark, not only of white Pentecostal denominations, but even of so-called "charismatic" groups of middle-class parishioners within mainline churches (among them, notably, the Roman Catholic), who are characterized by their emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, often evidenced by "speaking in tongues" (also known as *glossolalia*).[53]

This has profound implications for the congregation of ECWH. In the first place, it represents a reversal of the traditional process by which African Americans were "Christianized" as the result of European missionary activities (in the colonial era) and, later, through the religious teaching of white American ministers (Southern 1983a, 36-42). As such, it is another practical demonstration of an inversion--in this instance of what Ingrid Monson has called "the asymmetrical conditions of cultural contact between African- and

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[52] J. Gordon Melton, ed., *The Encyclopedia of American Religions: Religious Creeds* (Detroit: Gale Research Co. 1988), 401.

[53] See, for example, Mary Jo Neitz, *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1987), especially 16-20.

European-Americans" occasioned by the forcible relocation of Africans to America.[54] Cultural practices formerly restricted to the black church (and to a limited number of white Christians through informal contact and some resultant cross-culturation), by means of this one event (the birth of the Pentecostal movement in the United States) have become part of the religious experience, not only of white North Americans, but of millions of Christians internationally. "Pentecostalism ... is one of the fastest-growing denominations in the world, especially among oppressed peoples" (West 1982, 149).

The black church introduced to white congregations, through the Pentecostal movement, an entirely new concept of what it meant to worship through music and what Titon calls the other "performance genres" of the church (1988, xv):

> The pentacostal church called for full participation of the congregation in all its worship activities; as a contemporary observer pointed out, "Music [was and] is [today] exploited to a degree that probably is not attained in any other denomination." One of the patriarchs of the ... church is reputed to have said, "The devil should not be allowed to keep all this good rhythm".... During the musical performances of the worship service, members of the congregation clapped their hands (typically on off-beats of the music), tapped their feet, and, if so moved, played their own tambourines and joined in the singing with the choir. Moreover, religious dance was an integral part of the worship ceremonies.
>
> The keyboard instrument ... was hardly an accompanying instrument but rather a full partner in the music making, fill[ing] in pauses in the singing with improvisation--broken chords, arpeggios, runs, glissandos, and other kinds of embellishment ... Thus improvisation took place on two levels, the melodic and the harmonic. A third level was represented by text improvisation: performers were free to add words to the original text or to omit them, to reiterate single words or phrases, or to interject exclamatory words. Members of the congregation, too, might toss

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[54] Ingrid T. Monson, "Forced Migration, Asymmetrical Power Relations and African-American Music: Reformation of Cultural Meaning and Musical Form," *World of Music*, vol. 32, no. 3 (1990): 22.

> words or snatches of phrases into the musical performance in call-and-response fashion.[55]

All of the musical activities described in the above excerpt have, at various times, also been part of the worship service at ECWH, although other Pentecostal practices, such as "speaking in tongues," are not present.

The relevance of all of this to the ministry of the church lies in the fact that although ECWH was founded upon a Baptist theological foundation, most of the white (and many of the black) congregants to whom I spoke at ECWH have formerly been members of Pentecostal churches. And, while the other members of these earlier church homes were almost exclusively white and their worship practices were not completely synonymous with those outlined above (some of my consultants described their earlier experiences as "quieter"), the qualities of improvisation and participation prized by Pentecostals would have been common to both worship settings. Consequently, believers familiar with Pentecostal worship would be more likely to, in Titon's words, "feel comfortable" at ECWH, able to relate almost instantaneously to the ministry. Such was the experience of the following congregant, a white woman raised as a Pentecostal, who describes her first experience at the church:

> *When I went to church that Sunday, I was looking for something. When I walked into those doors of that church, I just felt the Holy Spirit ... and I knew this was it.... The moment I walked in, I started crying and I cried the whole time I was there, and it got me back on my feet again.* (Virginia Holmkvist, member of the congregation.)

Whereas I, a fellow Baptist, sharing a great many points of *theological* congruence with the members of ECWH, had nonetheless been acutely aware of difference when entering "those doors of that church," her prior *experience* of worship had, I believe, enabled her to more easily disregard apparent boundaries and recognize commonality.

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[55] Southern 1983a, 448-9. The quotations are from John Work, "Changing Patterns in Negro Folk Songs," *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 62 (1949): 140.

Another woman, earlier in this paper, has spoken of the feeling of "coming home."[56] I initially assumed that, because she is African-Canadian, she was referring to her heritage as a black woman--but she also has a Pentecostal history, and is careful to identify the relationship she discerns between the cultural and the spiritual:

> *It's knowing God. That's the top priority. Nothing should interfere with that. Heritage might bring [the people]. Hopefully, God would hold them ... not heritage, because that can come and go.* (Marlene Brown.)

It seems that, along with the doctrine--the concern with the "knowing" of God--the norms of worship practised at ECWH represent an accumulation of cultural and religious memories which determine how each of these women, and their fellow believers, will interpret the meaning of their experience at the church.

3.4 The Idiom of Expression

In the services of ECWH, distinctive patterns of speech, or "poetic language" (Titon 1988, 207), take the form of phrases, often biblical although applied to contemporary human situations. They occur within prayers, they appear as extemporaneous responses from the congregation, and they are present in songs and sermons. A review of one service reveals the following phrases and words, familiar because of the frequency with which they recur in the context of worship at ECWH:

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[56] Page 41 of this paper.

Praise the Lord
Hallelujah
on fire for the Lord
Jesus Is the Answer
Praise His holy name
Thank You, Jesus
Thank You, Lord
Hosanna in the Highest
Have Your Way, Lord
Glory to Your name
He is the great healer
Glory to God
To God be the glory
He is the King of Kings
He is the Lord of Lords
He is the Lily of the Valley
He is the Bright and Morning Star
Amen

Such expressions can be regarded as "formulaic" in the sense that they are used repeatedly, interjected into appropriate contexts during the course of a service.

Bruce Rosenberg, in his study of the American folk preacher, has attempted to explain this practice by situating it within the "oral tradition," the premise being that the use of oral formulae aids in the improvisation of extended narratives. Such a theory was proposed by Albert Lord and Milman Parry to explain how pre-literate epic story-tellers were able to remember and repeat, seemingly verbatim, very long chronicles.[57] Although the motivation is now different, Rosenberg suggests that a contemporary, highly-educated minister will practise, in a similar fashion, a style of sermonizing incorporating familiar motifs into an improvised poetic diction marked by measured rhythm and a chant-like delivery. He (and sometimes she) does this, not from necessity, but by choice, because "this style not only comes 'naturally' to him but he believes it to be the most effective way to communicate the Word of God" (1970, 97).

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[57] Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (New York: Harvard University Press,1965), and Milman Parry, "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philosophy* XLI (1930), cited in Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 46-7.

These motifs are often accompanied by, or are themselves a part of, parallelisms--balanced constructions of words which linger long in the memory. They may be biblical in origin:

> *He has called me to proclaim deliverance to the captive;*
> *He has called me to proclaim comfort to the*
> *brokenhearted ...*[58]
>
> *He is the Alpha and the Omega,*
> *the beginning and the end.*[59]

They may be maxims:

> *We are who we are*
> *Because He is who He is.*
>
> *God has called me*
> *To comfort the disturbed*
> *And disturb the comfortable.*
>
> *Much prayer (much power);*
> *Little prayer (little power).*
>
> *Prayer is not just something you say from your lips;*
> *It's something you say from your heart.*
>
> *The mind is in heaven,*
> *But the flesh is on earth.*[60]

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[58] Paraphrased from Luke 4: 18.

[59] Paraphrased from Revelation 1: 8.

[60] Each of the foregoing examples is from a sermon by Rev. J.T. Collins,

Imagery and symbolism often add further layers of "embodied meaning,"[61] as in this powerful metonym, part of a sermon preceding the sacrament of communion:

Do you want to drink from the cup?
There's pain in the cup.
There's agony in the cup.
There's death in the cup.[62]

These speech patterns become most pronounced during the climactic section of the sermon, when the minister's voice shifts into the cadenced song-speech that Jeff Titon calls "chanted preaching" (1988, 309),[63] but which Reverend Collins refers to as "whooping":[64]

> *That is the root of African-American preaching, generally speaking.... You call it singing, we call it "whooping" in the States. (That's a term we use among preachers). It's a part of the church; it's a part of what would be unique here, but would be standard in any African-American church that you'll go to. It's like a climax. It's intense, it's exciting, it's a celebration.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

Not all of the sermons at ECWH are characterized by whooping, but Reverend Collins identifies it as "the root" of African-American preaching, and its onset, about fifteen minutes before the end, is greeted with expectancy by the congregation:

Sr., October 19, 1995.

[61] See Naomi Quinn for a discussion of "The Cultural Basis of Metaphor," in *Beyond Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*, ed. James W. Fernandez (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 65.

[62] From a sermon by Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr., November, 4, 1995.

[63] See also page 49 of this paper.

[64] See also page 22 of this paper.

When He heals the land joy comes into the church;
When He heals the land peace comes into our hearts;
When He heals the land we hear a new voice,
leading us and guiding us;
When the land is healed we're no longer the same.

Over and over we've heard the testimony,
"I felt bad when I came through the doors
But when I got into this church
And I began to listen to the choir sing
And I began to enjoy the service
Something happened to me."--Am I right about it?

The reason for that is because we have stepped on healed land.
Well, let's talk about whose healin' it is, because everyone who talks
about healin' can't heal.

But the Healer that I'm talkin' about fed the multitudes;
The Healer that I'm talkin' about gave sight to the blind;
The Healer that I'm talkin' about raised the dead;
The Healer that I'm talkin' about stopped in Watts, California,
in the early seventies,
took ahold of my hand,
walked with me,
talked with me,
guided me,
and gave me a brand-new life.

What I have God gave me;
Where I've been God was the one who took me;
Where I'm trying to go God'll have to be the one who
carries me;
Because He is the great Healer.

I trust Jesus Christ;
I love Jesus Christ;
I'm passionately in love with Him
because of what He's done for me.

People tell me I'm too demonstrative.
But I've seen people at the Edmonton Eskimos football game-
they're demonstrative;
I've seen people at the hockey game-
they'll knock you out your seat;

And so, when I come to church,
I'm excited about the land I'm standing on;
I'm excited about what He's doin' for you;
I'm excited about how He's walkin' with you
and how He's inspirin' you;
I'm excited about how He's keepin' you;
I'm excited about how He's given you employment;
I'm excited about how He's provided for you
when you couldn't provide for yourself.

Yes He is the King of Kings.
He is the Lord of Lords.
He is the Lily of the Valley
And the Bright and Morning Star.

I feel like celebrating today!...[65]

At this juncture, his sentences become shorter and more accented, the voice shifts rhythmically between two pitches, the organ and percussion join in antiphonally, and the audience responds--raising hands, swaying, clapping rhythmically, and finally standing, one by one, and applauding to the finish.

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[65] From a sermon by Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr., November 19, 1995.

The genesis of this "rhythmically rhetorical style" (Williams-Jones 1975, 383), utilizing parallelism, imagery, and repetitive phrases, may indeed have been its effectiveness as a means of ensuring that what was spoken would be remembered--not only by the speaker, but also by the listeners. Or it may have occurred as the natural outcome of the fact that, in earlier times, the gospel soloist "was usually the preacher himself" (Williams-Jones 1975, 382); consequently, the same poetic lines could be either sung or chanted. Whatever the cause, the chanted part of the sermon is the occasion for certain idiomatic expressions to be presented in a quasi-musical fashion.

Conjectures about the origins of a distinctive preaching style may cloud what is the most significant aspect of this "idiom of worship" to the people at ECWH--the familiarity of the *language* of these sermons (as well as of the prayers, the music, and the congregational responses) to all Christians. Much of it is based on quotations, references, or pictorial images to be found either in the King James Version of the Bible or in traditional hymns; as such, believers from all denominations (in particular, those who share an identification with the American "folk" church) would recognize them. More specifically, the language used to express spiritual ideas is grounded in a particular kind of vernacular, or "church-speak," shared by Baptists, Pentecostals, and other related denominations. Thus, most visitors to the church, who might be unfamiliar with certain aspects of the *practice* of worship they encounter, would have little difficulty in understanding the *message* communicated by song, prayer and sermon.

Such points of congruence are the sites at which communication can take place. "The meaning [of speech acts] is dependent on a mix of intention and convention; that is, upon what the speaker intends and what interpretative conventions obtain among the speaker and listeners" (Titon 1988, 207).

3.5 Celebration: The "Signal Difference"

We have been considering "interpretative conventions" grounded in a doctrinal and textual system of beliefs *shared* by Christian leaders and congregants, both black and white. This, we have said, enables people of different ethnic and denominational backgrounds to unite in a common worship. However, there is one aspect of the ministry of ECWH which is rooted in a historical cultural experience that would appear to have no direct relevance to many of the people who attend. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., applying the description, "repetition with a signal difference," to black literary style, is concerned with "the formal manner in which texts ... address their antecedents" (1989, 51). He reminds us that African-American writers and musicians have access to a rhetorical form which, in effect, enriches the meaning of words.[66] In the case of the "spiritual language" used at ECWH, this finds expression in a certain "sameness with a difference" marking the way in which orthodox Christian beliefs are expressed:

> Certain words and construction seem to carry an inordinate charge of emotional and psychological weight, so whenever they are used they set all kinds of bells ringing, all kinds of synapses snapping, on all kinds of levels.... I am speaking of words ... which have levels of meaning that seem to go back to our earliest grappling with the English language in a strange and hostile land. These words, of course, are used in complex associations, and thus form meaningful wholes in ways which defy understanding by outsiders. [There is] a massive concentration of Black experimental energy which powerfully affects the meaning of Black speech, Black song, and Black poetry.[67]

I would suggest that both the *style* of performance and the *focus* of ministry are unique and meaningful because of their origins in the experience of people who, throughout an oppressed history, expressed and overcame pain through a distinctive use of speech arts.

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[66] See also pages 15-16 of this paper.
[67] Henderson 1973, 44.

Reverend Collins's sermon must really be heard, rather than read, in order to understand the truth of the statement that, sometimes, "meaning [can] follow sound as much as sound does meaning."[68] Psalm-like imagery and biblical allusions follow each other in such profusion that the listener who shares the same textual roots is inundated with pictures, associations and memories. The mental images are not the result of theological rigor (although that, too, may be present). More importantly, this moment of celebration is one which involves minds, senses, and bodies in a corporate outpouring of worship, intensified by the confluence within each individual worshipper of layers of meaning, accumulated through countless other religious experiences, and recalled by the repetition of the language of praise.

The theme of this preaching is not accidental. For while it is true that the idiomatic expressions enumerated and discussed above are in no sense sectarian or narrowly parochial, but instead trace their origin to religious texts common to a great many Christians, it is also obvious that innumerable other expressions, similarly concise and equally poetic, could have been chosen from the same sources. The question therefore becomes, "Why are these particular phrases so popular, and what do they have in common"?

One realizes almost immediately that they are overwhelmingly declarations of adoration (although I was not conscious of any effort on my part to be selective as to theme when I collected them). It would appear that they represent a significant hallmark of the church; and this conviction is reinforced by Reverend Collins's comment :

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[68] Anthony Stanhope, *Poetry as Discourse* (New York: Methuen, 1983), 89-90, cited in Gates 1988, 63.

> *We come to this church to praise Him.*[69]

My awareness of this "signal difference" in emphasis was prompted by the first person to whom I ever spoke regarding the music of the church:

> *We say the same words, but the meaning's different.... The comfort, the feeling of security and belonging, is part of the culture ... I associate guilt with the white church (and repentance and quivering and fear) as opposed to relaxation and celebration in the black atmosphere.... The difference is, "Yes, you've sinned but you can do better.... And let's not dwell on it".... There's hope .... The guilt is downplayed and people can laugh, they can clap .... It's a freedom!... It's a celebration and it also demands a bigger commitment.* (From an interview with a congregant.)

At first skeptical, I began to "listen with different ears" and to test his perceptions against those of other listeners; I gradually became convinced of the validity of what he was saying. As another believer explained:

> *It's an encouraging thing, to build people up.... I've heard our pastor say that people are already tore down when they come in, so they need something positive to build them up, rather than go the other way to beat them down.... There must be something that's being said to them when they come, that they just feel accepted and maybe loved.... You know, you can become so negative that people get discouraged and give up.* (From an interview with a congregant.)

Songs, prayers and sermons are never without reference to the love, the faithfulness, and the forgiveness of God; and the corollary to this is the hope, the joy, and the thankfulness of the believer. Reverend Collins's sermon is filled with expressions of praise, as are the prayer and *the entire repertoire* of songs from the same service (November 19, 1995), recorded below:

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[69] From a sermon by Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr., November 19, 1995.

Songs:

1. *Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord.*
Get up off your seat and praise the Lord.
Shake off your heaviness,
Lift up your holy hands,
Come one, everybody, Praise the Lord.

2. *You can't make me doubt Him;*
I know too much.
You can't make me doubt Him;
I know too much.
Too much about His goodness,
Too much about His love,
You can't make me doubt Him;
I know too much.

3. *He that believeth, He that believeth,*
Will have an everlasting life.
He that believeth on the Father and the Son
Will have an everlasting life.

I got it	*(I got it)*
Everlasting life	*(everlasting life)*
I got it	*(I got it)*
Everlasting life	*(everlasting life)*

(Number three was sung by "The Little Saints" (the junior choir) in a call-and-response format.)

4. *O magnify the Lord,*
For He is worthy to be praised.
O magnify the Lord,
For He is worthy to be praised.

Hosanna! Blessed be the Rock
Blessed be the Rock of my salvation.
Hosanna! Blessed be the Rock
Blessed be the Rock of my salvation.

5. *Jesus loves the little children,*
All the children of the world.
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

6. *Refrain:*

We're gonna lay down our lives for the Lord,
Lay down our lives for the Lord.

Verse one:

There'll be singing over yonder, singing over there.
When the singers get together, then we're gonna
enjoy one another.

Verse two:

There'll be shouting over yonder, shouting over there.
When the shouters get together, then we're gonna
enjoy one another.

Verse three:

There'll be families over yonder, families over there.
When the families get together, then we're gonna
enjoy one another.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
In Your name, and Your name again we come before You,
Thanking You and praising You.
We glorify You for bringing us through the past week.
We thank You for Your love, kindness and gentleness towards us.
Bless the offering, we pray.
Bless everyone who gave and everyone who could not give.
We give you the glory.
In Jesus' name I ask these words.
Amen.

The congregational singing which opens each service is known as "celebration," and Reverend Collins uses the same term to describe the particular type of sermon cited above. He further elaborates:

> *I think that all that I speak, or speak and sing, is worship unto the Lord, and it's a specific cultural style. It's a specific gift that I think has been given to our [the black] community. Now, it was confined and routed and segregated to one community for so long. It's not new to us--it's new to those that haven't been exposed [to it].*
> (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

These celebratory sermons constitute about half of those preached at ECWH, the others being more accurately described as "teaching" sermons, dealing with tenets of belief. Even here, however, the music has the theme of praise:[70]

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[70] Congregational singing, January 7, 1996.

Songs:

1. *Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,*
Since I lay my burdens down
Glory, Glory, Hallelujah,
Since I lay my burdens down.

I feel better, so much better
Since I lay my burdens down ...

There's a better home awaiting
Since I lay my burdens down ...

2. *Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna to the King of Kings.*
You are worthy, worthy to be praised.

Every knee shall bow to the Lord God Almighty,
Every tongue shall confess that He is Lord.

3. *He has done great things for me,*
Great things, Great things,
He has done great things for me.

Brought me from a mighty long way,
Long way, Long way,
Brought me from a mighty long way.

He will bring you victory,
Victory, Victory,
He will bring you victory.

4. *'Tain't nobody do me like Jesus,*
'Tain't nobody do me like the Lord,
'Tain't nobody do me like Jesus
He's my friend.

5. *Praise Him, Praise Him,*
Praise Him in the morning, Praise Him in the noonday,
Praise Him, Praise Him,
Praise Him when the sun goes down.

Serve Him, Serve Him ...

Love Him, Love Him ...

Thank Him, Thank Him ...

What does "celebration" signify to the members of the church? It is, perhaps most profoundly, an expression of an African-American tradition which, to quote Cornel West, "does not romanticize or reject Afro-American culture":

> Instead, it accepts this culture for what it is, the expression of an oppressed human community imposing its distinctive form of order on an existential chaos, explaining its political predicament, preserving its self-respect, and projecting its own special hopes for the future.[71]

This tradition, says West, is best exemplified by its music, one manifestation of which is "the exuberant exhortation and divine praise of the gospels" (1982, 86). Joy in the midst of sorrow and hope in the midst of oppression are both features of this music. These are transformed into outpourings of praise to the God who is both comforter and deliverer. And they are expressed in community:

> We know [who] we are by the way we walk. We know [who] we are by the way we talk. We know [who] we are by the way we sing. We know [who] we are by the way we dance. We know [who] we are by the way we praise the Lord on high. We know [who] we are because we hear a different tune in our minds and in our hearts.[72]

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[71] West 1982, 85.

[72] Ralph Ellison, "Juneteenth," *Quarterly review of Literature*, vol. 13, no. 3/4 (1965): 276.

To African-Americans such expressions thus have historical meaning:

> *Historically, when you couldn't go anywhere else for love and care and nurturing, you could go to the black church, and it became a part of not just sharing in the service, but it became home for our people.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

What of the Canadians who attend ECWH? Some African Canadians (for example, those whose parents or grandparents emigrated from the States) may share enough of a common cultural history with African Americans to identify with cultural forms rooted in this experience. For white congregants, the transference of meaning is less readily identifiable. Perhaps one clue lies in the testimony[73] of the woman who related so strongly to what she heard and felt immediately upon entering the church. (Her experience, that of tears, is not isolated; I have seen the same phenomenon in other first-time visitors). She traced her reaction to acute health problems--she was looking for help and support. Another young woman saw in the ministry the possibility of healing for emotional problems rooted in the past. A man has spoken of the freedom he experiences within the church services to cry--sometimes through sadness, and sometimes because he's "starting to feel better." For each of these people, the message of hope and forgiveness expressed through all of the speech and musical arts has become interwoven with their previous experience; and songs born of a cultural experience of suffering have communicated meaningfully to individuals enduring their own pain. Adversity is both universal and indiscriminate, and creative responses to it can reach across boundaries.

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[73] Page 54 of this paper.

3.6 Conclusion

The message of ministry--music and speech--at ECWH reflects a common religious heritage, involving biblical language and idioms previously familiar to virtually all of the people who meet there for worship. Similarly, the style of presentation, while characterized by "modes of expression that represent distinctive perceptions of reality," originating in "the joint communal existence of Afro-Americans" (West 1982, 88), has become somewhat familiar cross-culturally through the agency of Pentecostalism. And, ultimately, even the "signal difference" represented by the emphasis on celebration at ECWH has resonance for Canadians, both white and black, for whom this language of worship "provides satisfying mappings onto already existing cultural understandings" (Quinn 1991, 65). Enough of these understandings are held in common by the congregants to allow for the communication of shared meanings--and, thus, the experience of corporate worship.

Chapter Four

RECONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

4.1 The Creation of Sites of Meaning

Meaning results from communication. Languages must be, in some way, meaningful both to the people who articulate them and to those who listen, and *shared* meanings require a certain equivalence to exist between different persons' understandings of these languages. The music at ECWH is expressed in "languages," comprised of sound and text, which "speak" to each participant in a service; and both music and message convey ideas, images and associations through a complex process incorporating historical memories with contemporary perceptions and future expectations . Another factor is operational, as well: people's understandings of these languages are profoundly influenced by the interpersonal relationships operating between congregants. These are in a constant state of flux, affected not only by personalities, but by each individual's internalization of myriad preconceptions (and perhaps misconceptions).

The people at ECWH have committed themselves to an enterprise which wrestles with the complexities of heterogeneity. Shades of skin color and inflections of language are varied and conspicuous, but they are only the most noticeable of the differences represented by the people who choose to participate. It is obvious that the meanings conveyed by words and music are contingent upon these individuals' unique experiences--of being black, white, Canadian, American, male, female, indigenous, wealthy, powerful, victimized--of being alone, part of a family, or the partner in a biracial marriage. Regardless of these particularities, however, in order for a true sense of community to exist, each member must be able to sense that he or she is not isolated--that there is enough commonality of experience and/or expectations to enable the creation and communication of shared meanings.

The development of community in this church is, of course, complicated by the infinite variety of experience, which implies a proportionate multiplicity of attitudes about, and expectations of, the church and its program. Each member interprets words and actions in accordance with personal, individual needs, and the process of interpretation is influenced by past histories and present circumstances. Obviously, such diversity precludes any comprehensive, definitive analysis of individual interpretations of meaning. However, in considering a few of the issues implicit in the relationships forged at ECWH, perhaps we can begin to understand something of the challenge confronting this unique experiment in Christian community which aspires to minister to an interracial, multicultural plurality. How do the people who attend ECWH view themselves, each other, and their common ministry? And what do these representations of "self" and "other" reveal about the processes involved in the construction of meaningful dialogue?

4.2 Issues of Representation

bell hooks, in her book "Black Looks: Race and Representation," has spoken of the empowerment to be attained through the control of how one is represented.[74] In order for peoples of differing cultures, colors and creeds to relate as coequals, each must be able to participate in the formulation of self-images which most truly reflect how they perceive themselves--with complexity and individuality. hooks, an African-American woman, is primarily concerned not only with the manner in which the colonialistic attitude of a dominant white society produces harmful stereotypes *vis à vis* black culture, but also with the fact that, ironically, values reflected by these harmful images are shared by many blacks, who may consequently be unable to feel a legitimate pride in their own cultural heritage. Stuart Hall has described the process:

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[74] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992a), 1-7, 165-178.

> The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subjected in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalization. Not only ... were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as "Other".... It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another to subject them to that "knowledge," not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, but by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm.[75]

"Blackness," therefore, has suffered from the stereotypes projected upon it by people who had a vested interest in controlling its representation.

White and black people are, in a similar manner, subject to stereotypical understandings of "whiteness." Whites, even when not overtly racist, have been wont to imagine themselves as colorless, thereby conceptualizing "whiteness" as an absence of color--benign and/or inert. Even "good," liberally-educated white people may find it difficult to believe that their actions--indeed, their very presence--triggers all sorts of associations and cultural memories in non-whites:

> White students respond with naive amazement that black people critically assess white people from a standpoint where "whiteness" is the privileged signifier. Their amazement that black people watch white people with a critical "ethnographic" gaze, is itself an expression of racism.[76]

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[75] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference,* ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 222-237, cited in hooks 1992a, 3.

[76] hooks 1992a, 167.

It is, of course, ironic (and undoubtedly significant) that the liberal cry, "We are all just people," became most vociferous at about the same time as previously-subjugated people groups around the world began to insert their "voices"--critical, often demanding, and potentially transformative--into the discursive arena; where successful, the espousal of a generic humanity resulted in the imposition of an illusory homogeneity, a veritable "whitewashing" of difference in conformance with Western concepts of liberalism and idealism. As a result, whites were only infrequently forced to confront an often uncomplimentary--and certainly uncomfortable--view of themselves. The relatively recent multitextual approach to reading culture appears to be more democratizing, but even this "reading" has most often been done through white Western eyes.

To black people, the meaning of whiteness has been ambivalent. On the one hand, It has signified, since African-American enslavement, something to be feared. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* tells the story of a woman so terrorized by "whiteness" that she kills her young to spare them the ordeal of living in a world dominated by fear.[77] White people of good will may object to being included in a stereotype they feel does not accurately represent them, but John Howard Griffin, a white man who assumed an "other" identity for a six-week period in 1959, spoke of the moment he realized that he had walked into "a life that appeared suddenly mysterious and frightening," where even the gaze of a white man could cause cold sweat to break out on his body.[78] More recently, Grace Halsell also changed her skin to appear "black" and reports:

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[77] Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

[78] John Howard Griffin, *Black Like Me* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 8, 17.

> Caught in this climate of hate, I am totally terror-stricken, and I search my mind to know why I am fearful of my own people. Yet they no longer seem my people, but rather the "enemy" arrayed in large numbers against me in some hostile territory.[79]

That these two white people experienced what Halsell calls "a secondhand kind of terror" (Grossberg 1992, 342) almost immediately upon changing their outward appearance suggests that this is the result of more than a historical memory; what is operational is the process of interaction between people, and this process reflects a response to "difference" which has never been adequately engaged or exorcized.

Alternatively, of course, whiteness can also act as a site of aspiration for black people. Langston Hughes pointed this out in 1926:

> One of the most promising of the young Negro poets said to me once, "I want to be a poet--not a Negro poet," meaning ..."I would like to be white".... But this is the mountain standing in the way of any true Negro art in America--this urge ... toward whiteness ... to my mind, it is the duty of the younger Negro artist ... to change through the force of his art that old whispering "I want to be white," hidden in the aspirations of his people, to "Why should I want to be white? I am a Negro--and beautiful."[80]

More recently, in spite of the efforts of "Black is Beautiful" slogans and "consciousness-raising," both of which have been visible aspects of North American popular culture since the 1960's, bell hooks notes regretfully the value still placed on light skin and straight hair by her young black nieces and nephews (1992a, 3). Such attitudes, inculcated by an oppressive history, are pervasive and resistant to change.

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[79] Grace Halsell, *Soul Sister* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1969), cited in bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination," in *Cultural Studies,* ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), 342.

[80] Langston Hughes, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," *The Nation*, 122 (June 16, 1926): 692-4.

All of these images are the product of social systems in which a white hegemonic orthodoxy dictated how people of variant colors, cultures, and customs would be perceived. hooks suggests that bold, innovative initiatives are required to transform deeply-embedded systems of thought which trap even well-intentioned people into destructive forms of interaction. Consequently, it is essential that, in the contexts within which "the discourse of difference" takes place, attention be focused not primarily on stereotypes themselves, but on the interpersonal dynamics--the systems of behavior inspired by underlying imagery--that have fostered them, for in modifying these lies the promise of renewal. It is important, therefore, that milieus, or sites, be created within which old meanings attached to prior representations can be re-evaluated, perhaps to be replaced by new meanings resulting from what Lucy Lippard calls a regular "encounter[ing of] boundaries on a conscious level."[81] I believe that ECWH is ideally positioned to be such a site.

4.3 Site of Representation

Edmonton Community Worship Hour has an identity as a church whose worship style (including the music) is rooted in African-American religious experience. For example, it is extremely rare that anyone coming to the church for the first time would be unaware that it represents, to some extent, a "black gospel" church. Many people, members of other churches, are one-time visitors curious about what they perceive as the expression of a traditional message couched in what to them is an unconventional idiom. Others, who live in the surrounding community, have become cognizant of something unusual happening in their environs, and have become intrigued enough to investigate.

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[81] Lucy Lippard, *Mixed Blessings: New Art in a Multicultural America* (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 6.

What they find is a congregation comprised of both black and white members which, while reflecting strongly an African-American heritage, is most actively concerned about ministering cross-culturally. This emphasis is expressed literally in the Mission Statement, part of which identifies ECWH as "A Multicultural Congregation, Coming From Many Nations" (printed in the announcement bulletin distributed to congregants each Sunday); it is also illustrated pictorially by the coloring of the letters E, C, W, and H, in a sign at the front of the church sanctuary--red, yellow, black and white.

Its ministry is a result of the broaching of boundaries, by Reverend Collins, his wife (Renée) and family, along with a small number of congregants, in an attempt to create a particular ministry, the genesis of which he explains:

> *I pastored in Nevada eight years, and those were 99.999 per cent African-American churches, but I would always go to the pulpit, and in the back of my head was, "If I'm preaching an international, cosmopolitan gospel, then how come the faces in these churches don't represent that? If Jesus doesn't care about color, and He doesn't care about creed, and He cares about the heart, why is it I'm only preaching to blacks?" And that just burned within me because I believed that there could be an ECWH.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

Reverend Collins describes the church as initially having been very strongly characterized by the stylistic practices of the African-American church. Since these beginnings, however, innovations have gradually been introduced, and both leaders and congregational members speak of change in somewhat ambivalent terms:

> *We've initiated it [change] ... but it would be a great tragedy, in my opinion, if you took out all of the distinctives, because that's what makes us unique in the first place. I'm always emphasizing to members, you have to balance things out--so that's what we've done. With a vision, saying that change would come--and well it should if we're going to minister to this many people--but at the same time, when you come, we want you to understand that these*

> *are the distinctives that brought us here, that have kept us.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

> *I don't see a lot of people actually praising God verbally anymore, just with words and no melody, for long periods of time.... It just seems to be more of the singing.... I guess singing is a part of praise ... but sometimes when I start singing a song, it's like the Spirit just comes over me, and I close my eyes and lift my hands up and tell the Lord that I love Him and I thank Him for all that He's done.* (From an interview with a congregant.)

The woman quoted above notes that this practice of "praising" was something that she learned at ECWH; she had not done it in previous churches and, at the beginning, had to overcome feelings of inhibition in order to worship in this manner. But, having now experienced a freer mode of response, she would be reluctant to see it change profoundly or, indeed, disappear altogether.

Reference has already been made, in Chapter Three, to the celebratory sermons (perhaps the most distinctive part of what Reverend Collins calls his "pronounced" style). In response to a perceived need for more systematic instruction, these have been replaced two Sundays of the month by teaching sermons, focusing on Christian education. Another woman, active in church ministry, speaks of the necessity for this kind of change:

> *There's another side to the ministry, and that's the teaching so that people get good "food" and get the grounding, because the celebration preachings--they are so beautiful--but so that people don't come for the wrong reason ("Let's just go and hear this preacher whoop!"), there needs to be a balance in that. Serving Christ is more than just this part of it. There are areas where we have to grow and learn.* (From an interview with a congregant.)

Therefore, during the building of a church in Edmonton that would minister to diversity while retaining "the distinctives that brought us here," the leadership and members of the church are engaged in a process which involves adaptation of music, message, and relationships to the sometimes-evanescent requirements of a multivocal "body of believers."

Lucy Lippard has identified one of the dangers inherent in a postmodern approach to the study of identifiable culture groups: in "giving voice" to them, we may attempt to "hold the moment" and thus deny those who live them the freedom to change. She warns:

> Overemphasis on static or originary identity and notions of "authenticity" imposed from the outside can lead to stereotypes and false representations that freeze [non-dominant] cultures in an anthropological present or an archeological past that denies [them] a modern identity.[82]

Conversely, in an effort to avoid such "essentializing," we may deny others the right to define and subjectify themselves. An emphasis on the universal, if unaccompanied by an appreciation of the particular, can impose an illusion of homogeneity--a pseudo-conformity--onto human behavior. It is apparent that the leadership at ECWH is cognizant of both dangers and determined to avoid them. They are certainly not interested in creating an artifact, but they do want the church to be recognizable and distinctive:

> *In terms of approach or style--which is obviously very pronounced --initially I came in very strong as I am, because it was very important for me not to compromise who Johnny is, and it was also important, I thought, for those coming to see the real Johnny--this approach, his style--know how he does ministry. I have to say, though, as I've gone along, when you have so many people from so many places, all of them don't eat the same food, so I run a spiritual kitchen, now.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

Similarly, the music is not "fixed":

> *What we've decided now is whenever we sing, at least one of the songs we sing will always be a quiet, worshipful song--no jumping*

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[82] Lippard 1990, 12.

> *up and down and handclapping.... A chance for everybody to be quiet and let the spirit speak. We've been doing mostly praise songs and not enough worship songs, and to me the word "worship" is a lot quieter, easier.... We've done those quiet songs, and we've always got comments from members of the church that they were affected by them. I could see it when we would do them. Everybody just went quiet....* (From an interview with one of the song leaders.)

> *I'm not sure [what has caused it], but maybe it's just a different plane that God has taken us on. More of a--maturity? Just a different way of getting the gospel message across. It's like with the preaching. With the choir, it's kind of the same thing. People can get so used to you doing one set or style that they expect it of you, and now [the choir is] at a point where [these people] won't know what to expect because you're walking by the Lord's leading and you just want to make sure that everybody is ministered to--and not just in one particular way all the time. Because different people are listening, some will be spoken to by a soft, quiet song--other people, they need something more. But whatever it is, we want to minister to everyone and not just one particular group.* (From an interview with a member of the choir.)

The church is in the process of defining itself--both the leadership and the people who become active members are involved in determining its representation. The next question is, of course, "Who is being represented and how are they being defined by this representation?"

4.4 Negotiating Representation

By virtue of the fact that the majority of the congregation, as well as its leadership, is either African-Canadian or African-American, and that the music and message are referred to as "black gospel" in style (both by the people who attend and by others who have only heard of it), the ministry of ECWH may legitimately be said to have been defined, at least initially, by black people. More specifically, however, it was modelled on the black church as it exists in the United States:

> Toward the end of the eighteenth century a movement for the establishment of separate black congregations [in antebellum United States] gradually gained momentum, primarily because of the growing impatience of blacks with the discrimination they encountered in white churches.[83]

An incident in Philadelphia in 1792, when Reverend Richard Allen and other black members of Old St. George's Methodist Church walked out of the church after they had been banished to the balcony (by the white membership), is "one of the famous stories of [African-American] culture and ... history,"[84] and marks the spiritual genesis of independent American black churches and denominations. These churches became more than spiritual centres:

> The Black Church has no challenger as the cultural womb of the black community. Not only did it give birth to new institutions such as schools, banks, insurance companies, and low income housing, it also provided an academy and an arena for political activities, and it nurtured young talent for musical, dramatic, and artistic development.... Much of black culture is heavily indebted to the black religious tradition, including most forms of black music, drama, literature, storytelling, and even humor.[85]

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[83] Southern 1983a, 71.

[84] From an interview with Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr.

[85] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), 8.

ECWH thus represents the style of what Reverend Collins describes as "one of the strongest institutions that exists in the United States":

> *The reason for that is because the church has historically had these attributes: number one, it's been owned by the [black] community; number two, historically, when you couldn't go anywhere else for love and care and nurturing, you could go to the black church, and it became a part of not just sharing in the service, but it became home for our people, as well. It was the economic force in the community, it was a political force, in terms of voter registration. When you couldn't have socials anywhere else, they always evolved around the church. The church picnic was a major event--the saint and the sinner attended. When you refer to the African-American church--growing up in that environment, it was as common as putting on a shirt every day, to go to church on Sunday morning, so we grew up in church.... We had two places, home and church. It became an integrated part of life.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

Reverend Collins moved to a situation in Edmonton (at Shiloh Baptist Church) where the congregation was not homogeneously black, and primarily African-Canadian rather than African-American, and the cross-cultural aspect of his ministry has become even more pronounced at ECWH. He describes an event which became a watershed experience in his ministry. A white Englishwoman began attending the church while visiting with family in Edmonton:

> *She gave her life back to God, thanks to this church, basically. And she will never know what she did for my ministry because what she was saying--and, believe me, we were definitely into our style then, with no changes--but what she was saying is, "I recognize the Spirit of God in this environment, and I've come out of my bondage because of this ministry. It is a gift and I receive it." It can reach--that's the heart of it all--that it has no boundaries. I said, "Oh, yeah! We're on the right track, now."* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

These observations are particularly germane to our discussion because they express the perceptions of the person who has, more than anyone else, determined the character of the church. They reflect a pride in heritage, and the conviction that a "message" that could minister in such a wholistic manner to one community could also be "translated" cross-culturally and communicate effectively to those whose histories have been somewhat different.

A significant part of the language of communication used at ECWH to convey this message is, of course, the music; understandably so, because the sound and sentiments of black gospel are already as familiar to many church-goers as are the blues, jazz and rap to secular listeners. The adult choir, "Voices of Joy," is becoming highly visible in the Edmonton community, and has travelled to other churches in Alberta and the United States; it can fairly be said to represent the image of the church to the wider constituency.[86]

This representation is particularly meaningful to African Americans in the congregation, representing as it does their heritage. But how does this musical expression relate to Canadians, both black and white?

What of the African Canadians--those of Caribbean origin, or from Winnipeg, or from Amber Valley, Alberta?[87] These congregants are the heirs of music and customs which move to another "beat,"[88] or are far removed in time and geography from their American roots. However, their historical experiences share a certain commonality: black Canadians also are familiar with discrimination. Slavery was abolished within the British Empire in 1833, but prior to this time white Canadians had owned black slaves, and thoughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Canadian black people were often not welcome in white-dominated churches. "It was preferred that they find their own way to heaven";[89] consequently, in many centres in Canada one can still find churches which are identified as "black" by their own members as well as the larger white community, although they may not be restricted to black congregants.[90] In spite of this early discouraging history, however, many African-Canadian members of ECWH have previously worshipped in churches in which they were a "visible minority": for some, ECWH is the first church they have attended where the larger proportion of the congregation is African Canadian.

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[86] "Voices of Joy" performs annually at "Gospel Night," a multichurch concert of gospel music, held in February as part of the celebration of Black Awareness Week ; and at "Gospel Fest," a summer gospel festival which was initiated by ECWH in 1991.

[87] Amber Valley is a community in northern Alberta whose residents are the descendants of black settlers who moved from the southern United States during the first decade of this century, in response to the repression of the Jim Crow laws in the States. The black community in Winnipeg is also, in part, the result of the same wave of migration.

[88] See, for example, a discussion of African-Caribbean calypso music aesthetics in Annemarie Gallaugher, "Trinbago North: Calypso Culture in Toronto," in *Canadian Music: Issues of Hegemony and Identity,* ed. Beverley Diamond and Robert Witmer (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 1994), 372-4.

Both congregational singing and choir performances now include some songs which feature a calypso beat or the speech cadences of the Islands, but these are still relatively few in number. Yet, the joy and enthusiasm demonstrated by African Canadians as they sing American black gospel leaves no doubt that this music is meaningful to them. Perhaps a part of the answer is suggested by the following comments of a man whose family had emigrated from Jamaica to Toronto, and whose work subsequently brought him to Edmonton:

> *European-Americans stripped away everything they possibly could from the African slaves--language, culture, music,*

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[89] Colin A. Thomson, *Blacks in Deep Snow: Black Pioneers in Canada* (Don Mills, Ontario: J.M. Dent & Sons [Canada] Limited, 1979), 20.

[90] For example, Amber Valley, Alberta (see Thomson 1979, 76,77) and Winnipeg (a black church there is the previous chu[illegible] home for at least one member of ECWH).

> *everything. They would not allow them to use anything that they had learned. and they couldn't reinforce each other because [the slave traders] separated anyone they realized had been from the same village when they brought them over to the plantations. But out of that--out of a complete stripping of his culture, the Black still created a musical form that is the basis of North American music, which is loved worldwide.*
>
> *The music is a unifying force.... The church is a connection to my roots, which I haven't had before.*[91] *The gospel church is an American-culture church from the States, started by the slaves.* We say the same words, but the meaning's different *[from the white church]. The word "gospel" I honestly feel is a "black" word and I think the whites use it because all of a sudden they started singing and hollering in the churches. But I'm going for the roots, and my roots go from when I was born back through generations. A lot of the comfort, the feeling of security and belonging, is part of the culture, which I don't have, [but] I can see it through them.* (From an interview with a congregant.)

To this man, the music of American black gospel represents him in a way that other Western music forms do not (even though he is classically trained in Western "art" music). It expresses a cultural orientation which, in a sense, he has chosen to embrace, although his own past history makes this more difficult than, as he says, "if I grew up in a culture where I was allowed and taught from the beginning to be expressive." Coming to ECWH is, for him, an identification with a form of worship which expresses his own pride of heritage, and desire to "complete" his life, in ways that his previous church experiences could not. To him, and undoubtedly to many other African Canadians, American black gospel is still in some sense "their music," carrying with it cultural memories of strength and resilience, qualities which enabled the creation of a beautiful worship idiom, capable of triumphing over pain and oppression. And ECWH, so publicly identified with the expression of this musical genre, then becomes "home," a place to "belong."

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[91] He grew up in a British Methodist Episcopal Church which delivered what he calls a "white program" to black parishioners.

It is intriguing that something of the same sense of "instant belonging" is described by a white Canadian woman who came to the church desperately needing healing.[92] She was ill "physically, mentally, and emotionally," and the moment she walked into the church, she "knew this was it," the place where she would find help. Why was this black worship form, with which she had been unfamiliar, so meaningful to her? In her case, it is not primarily because of the *sound* of the music (she freely admits to being quite unmusical), but because of the "message"--the imagery and clarity of the sermons and the words of some of the songs. She feels that the church met her need, and perhaps part of the explanation is that she could relate immediately, both to people who would understand (and help her deal with) suffering, and to a message which emphasized hope:

> *The seed of gospel music comes out of adversity and a lot of pain. Historically, if you were on a plantation, you'd hear singing from the shacks where the slaves stayed, and that was transferred into church buildings in the 1800's. So you may work a whole week, but you know when you get to church and Sister Jones, who's had a rough week, sings "Amazing Grace," she is going to sing it in such a fashion that the whole congregation is going to be lifted. What you're really tapping into is the historical tradition of black gospel music.* (Reverend J.T. Collins, Sr.)

For other people, the music is a point of entry into the church. They involve themselves in its performance and find it an increasingly powerful personal expression of their own religious feelings. They may become members of a praise team or of the choir, singing in a "black" musical style to homogenously black churches in California and to all-white churches in Alberta. In the process, color differences can gradually become unremarkable:

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[92] See also page 54 of this paper.

> *I don't even look at the culture anymore; I just see people as they are. I feel very comfortable.* (From an interview with a congregant.)

This is a process to which I can relate. I clearly remember my first time at the church. I entered as a visitor, an academic observer, and never have I been so aware of my own "whiteness," in spite of the considerable effort to make me, and other visitors, feel welcome. It was an revealing experience which exposed me to the sensations that come as the result of being a member of a visible minority. Gayatri Spivak considers such encounters to be essential to the redefinition of intercultaral and interracial roles.

> What we are asking for is that the ... holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position and themselves learn how to occupy the subject position of the other.[93]

What Spivak seems to be asking for is yet another inversion--that of traditional power relations. To re-present oneself as a cultural minority, when one has been accustomed to feeling comfortable and "in control," is to become truly self-conscious. I was extraordinarily aware, for example, of my body--of how I should move (feet, hands, head, hips) during the congregational singing, of which there was a great deal--and convinced that I appeared awkward and insecure to anyone who might be watching. Feelings of inhibition may have also resulted in part from what African-American artist Adrian Piper has identified as a "sense of intrusion," a reluctance "to pretend to be what one is not" (Lippard 1990, 71). In other words, I was conscious, to a degree unusual in most situations, of my self-representation.

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[93] Gayatri Spivak, "The *Intervention* Interview," in *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 121, cited in Grossberg 1992, 346.

That this feeling has become progressively less acute as time passes indicates the potency of what James Clifford calls the "ironic play of similarity and difference, the familiar and the strange" (1988, 146), to bring about transformation not only of our images of "others," but of our "selves." As we become increasingly familiar with the norms of behavior and what these signify to other people, they become in some sense a part of our own personal response, factors in our construction of new perspectives (and, perhaps, new identities) by means of the "shifting [of] locations" (hooks 1992, 346). We are changed.

Reverend Collins has spoken of the experience of learning to "live in two worlds"--black and white. As a child in the black community, he was taught how to function in both. White members of the congregation are now involved in this process, albeit in a limited way. The congregation at ECWH contains many intermarriages, and for these couples and their children, the necessity to become comfortable "in two worlds" is of particular immediacy. The church for them is a "safe space," where black culture is seen to be valued by both white and black congregants, and where the people who worship together have moved across traditional boundaries *by choice*. Such sites of voluntary interaction are, as yet, relatively infrequent; where they exist, they provide a protected environment--an opportunity to explore one's own self-actualization in a context conducive to the re-examination of stereotypical representations.

4.5 Conclusion

> Among the pitfalls of writing about art made by those with different cultural backgrounds is the temptation to fix our gaze solely on the familiarities and the unfamiliarities, on the neutral and the exotic, rather than on the area in between--that fertile, liminal ground where new meanings germinate and where common experiences in different contexts can provoke new bonds.[94]

Edmonton Community Worship Hour is a very young church. The process of change and accommodation, inherent in all communal endeavors, is particularly evident because the congregation is engaged in "the search for a blueprint for the church."[95] Moving out into liminal space, where traditional boundaries shift and perhaps disappear altogether, can be "exhilarating and sometimes terrifying," a way of embracing the future "while remaining conscious and caring of [our] past" (Lippard 1992, 3,14).

ECWH provides such a space, in which former conceptualizations of what it means to be "black," "white" or both (or perhaps Asian or Latin-American) can be re-examined, revised and/or discarded in the light of present experience. While together in this context, people are confronted by variance; in a sense, they are setting themselves up for the possibility of discomfort and dislocation. They indicate by their presence that they are prepared to be vulnerable to possible misunderstanding, in the process of learning to communicate and share meaning. They are actively involved in the transformation of long-cherished conventions.

Perhaps the people who have risked the most are those who developed the original pattern for this church. They moved away from the comfort of a safe, comfortable homogeneity, from a history in which "both blacks and whites traditionally 'owned' their own churches."[96] In so doing, they have exposed themselves to the dangers, not only of being criticized by members of their own congregational communities, but also of being exoticized by the curious onlookers in the larger community, or of having their music appropriated by other musicians. This must be particularly troublesome to people who view the music of black gospel as an integral part of the Christian ministry, rather than as just another entertainment genre. In spite of this, they choose to be inclusive, welcoming the visitors who come every week, conscious that any engagement in interaction holds the promise of healing; they are convinced that among the curious are some who will remain because they find that unfamiliar "languages" can express shared meanings.

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[94] Lippard 1992, 9.

[95] From a sermon by Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr., December 3, 1995.

Thomas McEvilley reminds us:

> In a shrinking yet terrifying world, we have to learn--and use--each other's languages, for the future is an unknown language that we will compose together.[97]

By engaging in cross-cultural encounters on such a conscious level, other people's languages can become our own--capable of expressing aspects of ourselves that we may not even know exist. In time, we could begin to move away from dichotomies of "self" and "other" as we begin to acknowledge our "common anotherness" (Lippard 1992, 6). Learning to see ourselves in creative, transformative ways where "difference" implies potential rather than threat is perhaps the most powerful inversion of all.

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[96] From an interview with Rev. J.T. Collins, Sr.

[97] Thomas McEvilley, *Art & Otherness: Crisis in Cultural Identity* (Kingston, New York: McPherson & Company, 1992), 125.

4.6 Postscript

> *This thing about segregation--when it comes to the church, if they have that kind of attitude, black or white, then that's not the [true] church. So why does it need to be desegregated? It's already--if it [really] is the church--it's already desegregated. All that [places like ECWH] will have done is provide opportunities for people to meet together who already wanted to meet together.* (Linda Peko Campbell.)

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(*See also* Jones, LeRoi)

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